

A Realist Hero's Kingdom Reconstruction Chronicle

(現実主義勇者の王国再建記)

Volume 02

Conquest Arc

Dozeumaru

(どぜう丸)

Story Description:

In a world where the Demon King had taken over a fifth of the land. Souma Kazuya (Soma) was summoned to that world as a hero, but the king took a liking to his rich country strong army proposal and somehow handed him the throne. Soma, who had the throne forced upon him, forewent adventure, and together with the talented companions he gathered, went about his nation-building with his realism.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 0: War Potential Analysis

There is a realist that I respect to the same degree as Machiavelli: Sun Tzu.

By Sun Tzu I mean the Sun Tzu (who wrote [Sun Tzu's Art of War]) working for the court of emperor Wu during the Spring and Autumn period¹ of Chinese History or maybe his descendant Sun Bin (who wrote [Sun Bin's Art of War]) working for Qi during the warring states period. Both were excellent tacticians, and both their works were great works of strategy, but the thing I liked the most were how they were realistically thinking about things. The two of them who were born in troubled times, just like Machiavelli, figured out “what humans are”, and explained how to deal with them in the unending wars.

¹ «TN: 770-403 BCE»

The two gained renown in war, but having that said, they weren't warlike people. In fact, both of them counseled to not easily resort to acts of war. Sun Tzu in [Sun Tzu's Art of War – Attack by Strategem] said “supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting²”, while Sun Bin, in the meeting with King Wei, said “warmongers will inevitably lose³”.

² «TN: Sun Tzu's Art of War, III.2.»

³ «TN: Sun Bin's Art of War, Meeting King Wei»

However, those thoughts were but ideals in turbulent times. Without defending, without attacking, the end result is that more lives would've been lost. The two also knew this. To borrow the words of Sun Bin “Even the Legendary Lord wants to settle things with morals, yet it is not possible. Thus he can naught but throw down the wicked king in war”. Which is exactly why they strained their heads, how shall I not lose, how shall I win efficiently.

There were the famous words of [Sun Tzu's Art of War]: [If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles]. It highlights the importance of intelligence gathering, but

sometimes there are people who interprets this with the positive meaning of “To win we need to gather information first!”. In reality, in [Attack by Strategem], Sun Tzu wrote “If we are inferior in numbers to the enemy, we can flee”, or “avoid battle”. In short, you should compare the enemy’s forces with yours and fight only when you can win.

That was a long intro. If you ask what I meant to say, then as [Sun Tzu] said, I was planning to examine the difference between the forces of our Royal Guard and the Three Dukes.

First, the Royal Guard led by me. I probably only had ten thousand men I can throw into the war with the Three Dukes. The Royal Guard is formally 40 thousand men strong, but that number includes the mercenaries employed from the Mercenary State Zem and the troops of Lords outside of the Three Duchies, also, the number of Adventurers in the deal with the Adventurers’ Guild where [In return of yearly fixed payment to the Guild, Adventurers within the country will be employed as soldiers during emergencies] also counted toward that.

I had already discontinued the contracts with the Mercenary State Zem and the Adventures’ Guild under the reasons of Financial Retrenchment and “we can’t trust mercenaries”. Also, a lot of nobles and knights adopted a wait-and-see attitude with regards to the war with the Three Dukes and thus I couldn’t count on them. Thus the number I can mobilize is, my Personal Guard and the common soldiers combined, was only ten thousand. The common soldiers consist almost entirely of infantry (my Personal Guard is 800 heavy cavalry), but because I’ve been throwing them to infrastructure improvement lately almost all of them gained combat engineering skills. Also, the common soldiers include five hundred earth-type mages like Kaede-chan.

Now, about the Three Dukes’ side, their numbers are roughly as follows:

The Army, led by Georg Carmine, forty thousand.

The Navy, led by Ecksel Walter, ten thousand.

The Air Force, led by Castor Vargas, one thousand.

Among them the easiest to deal with would be the ten thousand navy.

Our numbers and theirs are not too different but most of theirs are battleship, cruiser, destroyer, and torpedo boat crew. The Marines that can fight a land battle only numbered two thousand. Therefore they aren't much of a threat on land.

However, there's one thing to keep in mind about the Navy. It's the one leading it, Duchess Ecksel Walter. She's a woman with character that uses her wisdom and courage in politics, and I heard she used her unique wit to weather the current food troubles. That kind of person probably won't be striking from the front, but take my back in a surprise move. If she were serious she could probably incite the citizens of the Royal demesne into an uprising, or at least she seemed capable of that. Personally, she's the one out of the Three Dukes I don't want as my enemy the most.

On the other hand, the general that's easiest to handle, but his army the hardest, would be the one thousand strong Air Force.

Their soldiers were basically teams of [a wyvern plus one or two knights], and they had one thousand such teams of flying dragon knights. Those flying dragon knights are a very troublesome enemy. Just the fact that they fly in the air is trouble enough, but the wyverns they're riding themselves are a mass of fighting force, they can breathe fire and act as fighters or drop gunpowder casks and act as bombers.

On the other hand, there are very limited means of attacking them from the ground. Only firing back magic or shooting magic-strengthened arrows at them. If we were attacked during a siege battle we can retaliate using magic-strengthened repeating bowguns but in a field battle they would be extremely difficult to stop. It seems to be common sense in this world that you'd need a flying dragon to kill a flying dragon. Which means for the Royal Guard who only has a few messenger dragons it would be very hard to properly counteract them.

As an addendum, wyverns are dragons whose front legs had turned into wings, and in this world, dragons with both front and back legs and wings exist. Wyverns and dragons only look similar but they seem to be as different as monkeys and humans. Dragons have racial magic power that

is incomparable to wyverns, have great intelligence, and also able to take the form of humans. They had joined together and built an unshakeable kingdom in the middle of this continent where they and humans both hold the boundary between them inviolable.

Among the northern countries there are dragon knights who make contracts with dragons. They are welcomed as the dragons' companions and in exchange for helping perpetuate the dragons' descendants, the dragons lend them their strength in battle. Incidentally, dragonewts are a rare breed born from among these knight and dragon pairs (the majority is evenly split between full humans and full dragons). Dragonewts have a low birthrate but their descendants are guaranteed to be dragonewts, and thus they already had the numbers to be considered belonging to neither the human nor the dragon species. The Air Force Marshal Castor Vargas is one such dragonewt.

The dragonewt, Air Marshal Castor Vargas is without exaggeration a one-man army. Being a dragonewt he could take to the skies on his own without a dragon, he is hotheaded and hates tricks, in a word ... a musclehead. Certainly, his individual strength is frightening but a commander like that is actually convenient for me. When fighting the Air Force, victory or defeat will depend on whether I can lead Castor by the nose, rendering the flying dragon knights ineffective.

Now lastly, the forty thousand strong Army, this time both the men and the general is troublesome.

It's not just simple difference in numbers, each and every soldier and their equipment is a rank up from the Royal Guard soldiers. In addition to infantry and cavalry, they also had siege units, and the fire mages attached to them have superior firepower, they are indeed the forefronts of warfare.

And in command of this Army, there is the fearsome General Georg Carmine.

He was an uncommon man that, while having valor that was not inferior to Castor, he did not rely on just that and gave calm judgements

backed with experience. In the Annals of the Three Kingdoms he would be akin to Guan Yu or Lü Meng. Honestly, he's someone who I didn't want to make enemies of, just like Duchess Walter, but he wasn't hiding his hostility towards me at all. I might still be able to settle things with a talk if it were Duchess Walter or Duke Vargas, but Duke Carmine first and foremost had unmistakably become my enemy. There are rumors that he has connections to Amidonia, as well.

According to Hal's father, Glaive Magna, this attitude of Duke Carmine's certainly brought forth questions, and there are many Nobles and Knights in the Army that had joined a secessionist faction. However, their numbers were made up for by the personal armies of the corrupt nobles and the Zemish mercenary bands that they hired: forty thousand strong Army, against ten thousand strong Royal Guard. Manpower-wise they are already four times our numbers. Going by Sun Tzu this is a number I should either run from or avoid a fight with. Seriously, this is hopeless. I'm certain I won't be able to win.

----- if I faced them head-on.

Sorry, but I'm an internal administrator.

I never intended to fight fairly in the first place.

I don't care about chivalry nor a soldier's pride.

War is deception.

Negotiations, strategy, diplomacy ... I will freely use everything.

They may call me petty or sneaky, but it's fine as long as I win.

I don't have to do it like a hero.

I don't have to do it like a king.

I will take command of the battlefields in my own way!

Chapter 1: Hide a Knife Behind a Smile

That day, a shock ran through the entire Kingdom of Elfrieden.

Rumor has it that King Soma was finally raising a subjugation army against the Three Dukes who wouldn't stop their defiant attitudes. This rumor shook the people. There had been many opinions regarding the King and the Three Dukes' discord, but the majority of the people never thought that it would escalate into an armed conflict. They had lightly thought that before the country breaks, either the King's side or the Three Dukes' side would give in, and before anyone noticed it they were already on the verge of an armed conflict. Rather, it's impossible to cool down now that it's come to this.



There are some people who heard the news jumping for joy and wearing a wicked smile.

The Principality¹ of Amidonia's Prince² Gaius VIII.

¹ «TN: A duchy-level territory that exists independent of a kingdom»

² «TN: here in the sense of Monarch of a Principality as opposed to Son of a King. I'll be using Crown Prince for the latter henceforth»

He had gathered the generals who are the leaders of the country and made a loud declaration.

"The time has come! Let us gather our troops at the border! Once the chaos starts we will begin our invasion into Elfrieden under the pretense of reinforcements! Our goal will be the south-western breadbasket! We shall take back what was once our forefathers' lands that had been stolen from us!"

“” OOOOOOOOO!!! “”

The gathered generals raised admiring voices, but among them ...

"Please wait Milord!"

There was just one dissenting voice, a man stepped out and knelt in

front of the throne.

The country's Minister of Finance, Gatsby Colbert. Gaius glared at him quizzically.

"So it's Colbert"

"With all due respect Your Highness, please reconsider this Elfrieden invasion! Our people are currently suffering under the food difficulties and the recession! If we go to war now our people are going to starve to death!"

"I know that. That's why it's vital that we take back the breadbasket region"

"We will need lots of resources to undertake this war! If we had those then we should be able to import foodstuffs from abroad! Rather than fighting a war we're not sure to win, and even if we win we aren't sure to get enough returns for the expended effort, we should better enrich ..."

"SILENCE!!"

Gaius roared at Colbert. He stepped down to him and kicked him flying.

"Guha"

"You administrators always say the same things! Work for domestic affairs, this isn't the time for that, is that all you people ever say! Look, while you're doing that our country is falling into ruin, and in contrast to that Elfrieden that was languishing under that fool of a previous King is now making a comeback since the new King was crowned!"

"T, that is ... because the new King Soma strives for national enrichment ..."

"You're still talking!?"

Gaius once again kicked Colbert flying. Something inside his mouth was cut and blood flowed through the sides of his mouth. However, Colbert did not stop speaking plainly.

Your Highness ... Our country's military has only a third of Elfrieden's manpower, and our national power isn't even a fifth of theirs. This is a

very, very reckless plan!"

"That I know! That's why now, when the three Dukes and the King are at a standoff is a good chance!"

"But you don't know how long this will go on!"

"Ha ha ha, that's nothing for you to worry about. That fearsome General Georg Carmine is the one insurrecting rebellion. That youngster of a King won't easily bring him down. It's the same even if Georg wins. With a traitor at the country's reins they can't settle down easily!"

Colbert bit his lips.

(Is that why he's so confident! Out of the Three Dukes only the celebrated General Georg Carmine raised his flags in revolt, but that is obviously a good chance for the Principality. Honestly, there's no saying whether a good chance like this will come around again in the future. Even the Prince is no longer young. He likely did not want to pass a chance to stand and lead in front of an army. However ... that way of thinking is too naïve!)

"Please listen, Your Highness! If we invade Elfrieden we will be censured by the other countries! We have signed the [Declaration of Humanity's Coalition against Demonkind]!"

"..... the [Humanity Declaration], is it?"

This is the first time until now that Gaius showed a faltering expression.

The [Declaration of Humanity's Coalition against Demonkind] is the name of the declaration and international treaty made by the largest and militarily most powerful state on the continent, the Gran Chaos Empire, at the brink of the Demon King army invasion, to cease all wars between humans and cooperate to stop the Demon King army invasion. The essentials of the [Declaration of Humanity's Coalition against Demonkind] can be summarized into the following three points:

First, to allow no change in borders due to wars or military operations between humans.

Second, to respect the rights to equality and self-determination of all peoples within every nation.

Third, for countries far from the Demon King Territory to support the bulwarks that are the countries near the Territory.

The second one is a bit hard to understand, but it is there in order to provide shelter for the peoples that are not the country's majority. It was included due to the fear that because border changes aren't allowed, then the countries might disenfranchise these peoples and deprive them of their property. It was not explicitly stipulated in writing, but in case a country were to violate any of these three points, the leader, the Empire, will intervene militarily. In short, this [Humanity Declaration] is a security treaty where, in exchange for disallowing aggression toward foreign countries, one's country's safety would be guaranteed by the Empire.

"By invading Elfrieden we would be inviting military intervention from the Empire! I beg of you Your Highness, please re-think this!"

"Ugh..."

"Sir Colbert, you need not be concerned about that"

The one who stepped up and said so was the Crown Prince Julius Amidonia.

A wicked smile was plastered on his handsome face that one may call a bishonen.

"The reason being, Elfrieden is not signatory to the [Humanity Declaration]"

"That is just sophistry, Crown Prince! We're attacking a non-signatory country while we can't even protect ourselves without the [Humanity Declaration]. That would stain the face of the Empire as the leader!"

"But diplomacy is all about the treaties exchanged. This all happened because of Elfrieden's obstinacy to resist the Empire's sublime intent to cooperate against Demonkind. We have made no mistake"

“But”

“Enough!”

Gaius drew out his Royal Sword in hand.

Then he pointed the tip of it at Colbert who was groveling on the floor.

“Colbert. I will order you to house arrest”

“Your Highness”

“You will watch from outside. You will watch as we take back the land of our forefathers”

With that declaration Gaius gave not a single glance at Colbert as he took Julius and the generals and left the audience chamber. Colbert who was left behind can only bang his fists on the carpet as he bit his lips.

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A few hours later, a dejected Colbert tottered as he was walking along the castle’s corridors, when a charming young lady suddenly showed her face from behind a marble pillar.

“Howdy Colbert-san. How’s profits?”

“Princess!? Um, well ...”

It was the first Crown Princess Roroa Amidonia. Colbert flew into panic, having shown a dejected face to Roroa. Roroa has had a good sense of economics from a young age and as she grew in age, she had taken to associating with large national stores and financial bureaucrats, and had unawares become a figure that was able to support the country’s economy from the shadows. For the 28-year-old Finance Minister Colbert, Roroa was a friend who understands business, a comrade-in-arms against the recession, and somewhat of a troublesome little sister character.

Looking at Colbert’s face, Roroa smiled apologetically.

“Your face ... did ya give Lord Father some good advice again?”

“Eh, ah, you see ...”

“Sorry my old man’s an idiot. Sheesh ... keeping a retainer with good

advice at arm's length, the country's gonna go head first to ruin. The hell's he thinkin"

Roroa prickled with anger.

Seeing Roroa become like that for him, Colbert felt like he can forgive everything.

"Thank you very much Princess. Your sentiments are plenty enough"

"Really? So let's be gettin ready"

"Huh? Getting ready?"

Not being able to cope with the sudden development of things, Colbert became confused.

Seeing that, Roroa smiled gleefully.

"Lord Father gave you free time anyways right? So let's disappear with me. 'S gonna be fine, I already talked to all the important finance ministers, I told them all imma go sightseein' at old man Herman-sama's place in Nerva♪"

"???"

◇ ◇ ◇

A few days later, at the same time Gaius VIII and Julius departed for the front, there was an incident in the Royal Palace where Princess Roroa and the Minister of Finance disappeared. However, by Roroa's ingenious hand, this event was concealed, and Gaius and Julius never knew it happened.

«TN: The title refers to one of Sun Tzu's Thirty-six stratagems»

Chapter 2: Lieca's Heart

Elfrieden Kingdom's Capital City, Parnam. Parnam Castle.

In the Government's Affairs Room, I was receiving reports from Poncho and Tomoe-chan. First, was the report from Poncho. Until just a few days ago, his title was the Minister of Food Problem Affairs, however since the problem had already been resolved nowadays, because of his merit, he had been promoted into the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. He would tackle projects of Agriculture, newly established Forestry, Food Supply Management, and in addition, the development of the terraced rice fields as this country's new agricultural crops.

By the way, there were no "Fisheries" in the ministry title because this country didn't manage the fishing rights directly, since it was the domain of the fishermen's guild whose branches established at various places. In exchange of the tax income from the guild, the country granted the rights to the guilds. I also wanted to devise reforms in that field sooner or later, however only after I seize control of the navy. To guard the interests of the fishermen of this country, a department similar to the Coast Guard is necessary. Without this protection, the fishermen wouldn't abide if I only by using duty and obligation to force them follow my reform plan.

Let's return to the topic. I asked Poncho.

「What about the matter of the military provisions (soldier's ration and horse's fodder) that I had asked of you?」(Souma)

「Yes. One way or another, we had prepared it, however.....」(Poncho)

Poncho wiped his sweat while answering the question in evasive manner.

「Is something wrong?」(Souma)

「No..... Actually, what is bothering me is the amount. After all, the number of the military provisions that Your Majesty had requested was enough to feed the Royal Army for one month and still have enough surplus left over..... If these excessive numbers were actually incorrect,

then won't it become an enormous loss, yes?」(Poncho)

Ah, I see. If only based on the number of soldiers in the Royal Army that were mobilized by now, the number of provisions was too much and this made him worried. After all, the Royal Army was only 10,000 strong right now. However,

「Don't worry. There's no problem.」(Souma)

Oops, this was like triggering a flag. Let me restate myself.

「This is the most optimal number. You could even say that this large number of provisions would be the decider of victory or defeat in this war.」(Souma)

「I-Is that so?..... Then it's good that this year's harvest is abundant. If it was last year then it would be absolutely impossible to prepare this large amount.」(Poncho)

「Ahh, but it is thanks to everyone doing their best. Of course, it's also thanks to Poncho.」(Souma)

「I-I'm not worthy of those words, yes!」(Poncho)

While making a wry smile at Poncho who straightened his body too much that he bent backward as he replied, I shifted my attention towards Tomoe-chan.

「Tomoe-chan, how about your side?」(Souma)

「Y-yes, we already gained the cooperation of five new rhinosaurses.」(Tomoe)

Putting my hopes in Tomoe-chan's 『Ability to understand an animal or monster's language』, I requested her to "invite" the large lizard rhinosaurs like the one that participated in the God's Protected Forest relief duty, because I am very impressed by their ability to haul large amounts of materials over long distance. Although the Royal Army wanted to increase the number of the rhinosaurses in their possession, it takes a lot of time to train one conventionally. After all, its size is humongous. If it ended up raging, it could cause serious damage.

This was where Tomoe-chan played her part. Tomoe-chan could use her ability to listen the rhinosaurus' requests. Well since rhinosaurus lack intelligence (their brain is only as big as an egg, so they could be said to be similar to a stegosaurus?), so their requests were mostly 「delicious food」 and 「a place where it is safe to breed」. For this reason, we needed to set aside territory to create a “rhinosaurus reserve”, however with this, we could easily obtain an obedient means for long distance high speed transportation without training.

「A-as expected, Tomoe-dono's ability is amazing, yes!」(Poncho)

「It's true. It's good that I could took you in before you fell into another country's hands.」(Souma)

「S-stop it, it makes me embarrassed.」(Tomoe)

With Poncho, both of us earnestly praised her, but maybe because she was embarrassed, her face became flushed. At that time, the door to the Government's Affair Room was forcefully opened and Liecia burst into the room.

「Just a minute, Souma!」(Liecia)

「Wh-what's wrong? What's with the hurry?」(Souma)

Liecia approached me while panting and looked at me with a rather menacing expression before she pointed at the window.

「For crying out loud[1]! The whole kingdom is in uproar by the spreading rumor that 『Souma at last raised an Army to face the Three Dukes』!」(Liecia)

「..... Oh so it's only that?」(Souma)

「How could you say “It's only that?”」(Liecia)

She was so panicked because she thought that something had happened.

I then stood up and tapped Liecia's shoulder.

「Don't worry. That rumor is being propagated intentionally.」(Souma)

「Haa!?」(Liecia)

Liecia looked at me with wide eyes as if she had seen something unbelievable.

「Then why..... Aren't you supposed to have this covered this up until the last moment? You would end up providing the enemy by giving them needless information, you know?」(Liecia)

「If they didn't receive the invitation then I will be the one who will be troubled. Since this is a grand stage where the fate of this country will be decided, and every prospective actor and actress must stand atop the stage.」(Souma)

There will be multiple events happening at the same time at this current grand stage, and there also a part where luck will play a role. I think that perhaps we will never hold such a gala for a second time. So it would trouble me if there was an actor or actress late for the show on the grand stage.

「So..... that means you have thought of something, right?」(Liecia)

Liecia seemed to perceive something from my clear manner of declaring this.

Her eyes were shaking in uneasiness..... Recently, Liecia had been apprehensive. I aware that she was being torn by the possible conflict with her ex-superior Georg Carmine who she respected. However, we had reached a point of no return.

「Poncho, Tomoe-chan. May you leave us alone for a moment?」(Souma)

「Y-Yes, Yes!」(Poncho)

「U-understand. Nii-sama..... I leave Nee-sama in your hands.」(Tomoe)

After saying these words, both of them left the room. Only Liecia and I remained in the room.

Even when there was only the two of us, the room was silent without a single sound for quite some time. So, I stood from my seat and moved towards the bed located in the corner of the room.[2] And then I gestured

Liecia to come and sit down on it.

Liecia did as I asked of her to and sat down beside me.

Even though a situation where a beautiful girl was sitting beside me on my bed should be a lovely situation, the atmosphere between us was heavy..... The silence was painful.

「.....Liecia.」(Souma)

「.....Yes?」(Liecia)

「Please tell me about Georg Carmine.」(Souma)

「!？」(Liecia)

Liecia looked at me with bewilderment on her face.

「Do you..... still want to do something?」(Liecia)

「No, it's not that. Since we have reached this point, it won't change the plan..... I just want to know the person himself. Sincem if you think about it, I couldn't have a encounter with him in proper manner.」(Souma)

「.....」(Liecia)

Liecia was a bit perplexed, but soon, she began to share the stories bit by bit.

「As a public personage, Duke Carmine is a military man unprecedented in both past and present. It could be said that beside possessing indomitable individual fighting strength as a lion therianthrope, he also showed his true value when leading his soldiers. In sieging or defending a castle or in field battle, he was a great commander that managed to perform all kinds of duty, even at the time of the King two generations ago, he was responsible for the rear unit when the army withdrew, and despite losing the war, I heard that he had obtained the enemy general's head.」(Liecia)

「That's amazing.....」(Souma)

Even through a retreating battle, just by preventing damage to the ally could already considered a great success. However, he was able to inflict a

such a severe loss to the enemy. This is really amazing. In addition, his leadership increased the retreating army's moral and allowed them to search for a place where they could efficiently ambush the enemy. This made me remember the feat of the young Takeda Shingen[3] who conducted a surprise attack when he was left as the rear guard in his father Nobutora's Army's retreat.[4]

「During Father's reign, the country stopped its expansionist policy. Since to be honest, Father is just a very normal average king with no good or bad points in ruling this country, he was considered as easy prey by the other countries.」(Liecia)

「How harsh..... Even when he is your father.」(Souma)

「It's the truth. We can't change it. Since Duke Carmine exercised his authority in the west, both the Amidonia Dukedom and Torgis Republic couldn't interfere. Even as the greatest military man in this age, he didn't hold even a shard of ambition and he devoted his loyalty to Father..... No, it's wrong. Rather than my father, Duke Carmine genuinely loved this country.」(Liecia)

「This country?」(Souma)

「Do you know? There still countries that discriminate against other races in this world. The Empire currently touts equality between races, however there still areas that discriminate against non-human races. In contrast, the High Elves' nation in the north is championing high elf race supremacy and contempt towards other human-kind. However, there is no such type of discrimination in this country. After all, in the first place the races that loathe this type of discrimination, so that they wouldn't be enslaved by anyone, cooperated in founding this country. So Duke Carmine..... loves this country more than anyone else.」(Liecia)

At this point, Liecia paused for a moment, before continuing her words.

「As a private person, Duke Carmine is polite and can discern right from wrong. In his relationship with my father he crossed the personal and official line and become my father's counselor. Duke Carmine..... affectionately treats me like his true daughter, maybe because Duke

Carmine doesn't have any children. He even gave me a shoulder ride. I also, really like Duke Carmine.] (Liecia)

「.....」(Souma)

「When I wanted to enter the Army because I admired Duke Carmine, at the beginning he opposed it. He said that it wasn't something that a princess should do. However, in the end, he complied with my selfish decision. Well, after graduating from military academy I was placed close to him and was only used to urge the soldiers to fight more vigorously.」 (Liecia)

Well.... Of course you can't put a country's princess on the battlefield. It was clear that Duke Carmine had quite a hard time dealing with Liecia's tomboyish desires.

「He seems to be a man of character.」(Souma)

When I made this remark, Liecia bent down with a sad looking expression.

「Yes..... He is a really splendid person.」(Liecia)

「Liecia.....」(Souma)

「I don't know what exactly Duke Carmain is thinking, but..... perhaps this is because he is a military man.」(Liecia)

「Because he is a military man?」(Souma)

「Duke Carmine's age had already exceeded his mid 50s. A therianthrope's life span is not that different from a human's. As a general, he was still maturing by his pilling experience. However, as a warrior, only slow decline awaits him. That's why, perhaps he wanted to do something big for this country.」(Liecia)

「..... And because of that, he would even be a rebel?」(Souma)

「If he thought that it was for this country's sake, then Duke Carmine would do it.」(Liecia)

She spoke these words confidently..... I became a bit jealous.

Geez, then doesn't this mean that I must really prepare for the worst?

If I showed even a small opening, then I would be devoured by a lion.

After this, I would have a conference with the Three Dukes using the Royal Broadcast.

The Three Dukes also possessed Royal Broadcast Orbs, although they weren't as big as the one the Royal Family had (there only four such orbs in this country), actually it was like screen-phone used for video conferences. In this conference I would confront the Three Dukes' side and send them final warning for their vassalage. In case they refused it, then it would mark the beginning of the war. Ignoring the other two Dukes, the probability of Georg Carmine heeding this warning is zero.

「Liecia..... If it's too painful for you, then.....」(Souma)

「No, I will attend it.」(Liecia)

I couldn't finished my sentence, "It will be fine if you don't attend the conference." Liecia showed a smile in her gloomy face.

「I know. Duke Carmine had already resolved himself for this. It is not possible for us to turn back anymore.」(Liecia)

「Liecia.....」(Souma)

「Since I already know about that, I want to see it with my own eyes. That person's way of life.」(Liecia)

「.....」(Souma)

Liecia looked directly at my eyes and spoke these words.

"Way of life" huh?..... It's a phrase that's too heavy to be spoken by a 17 year old girl.

Only by possessing this resolution that could she be here.

.....I couldn't find any words to say.

That's why, at least, I embraced her shoulders. She was... trembling a bit. Liecia rested her head on my shoulder.

Even though I am a "Hero", even though I am a "King"..... I despise

myself who could only do this for her.

() () () () () () () () ()

[1] どうしたもこうしたもない is an expression of annoyance and exasperation... Don't know how to turn this to proper English. Is the word I choose already showed Liecia's annoyance?

[2] Why there is a bed in Government Affairs Room? Souma really married to his job...

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takeda_Shingen

[4] See Battle of Un no Kochi. When Harunobu (Shingen youth name)'s father, Takeda Nobutora, attacked Hiraga Genshin in his fortress at Un no Kuchi, but was forced to retreat. Harunobu, at the rear of the withdrawing forces, waited until they were clear of the fortress, and then turned around, leading his men to defeat a castle garrison which was caught unprepared, having seen the Takeda flee.

Chapter 3: Fish in Troubled Waters [1]

Parnam Castle's 『Royal Broadcast Room』.

There was a 2 meter diameter orb used for Royal Broadcasts floating in the middle of the room. Besides it were the Royal Broadcast's receiver instruments. The receiver instrument that each city had was installed together with a fountain that could generate mist. That instrument would project the images recorded by the Water Spirit Undine's mana and play the sound recorded by the Wind Spirit Sylph's mana. However, this room used a thin water tank filled with water as the substitute for the video display apparatus.

It could be said that if the former was like a cinema's projector screen, then the latter was something similar to a television. The ones in Royal Castle also had a clear video resolution. Since the orb in the castle was classified as an artifact (it was a relic of the ancient past with an unknown manufacturing method) so it was impossible to be mass produced however, I thought that if the castle's receiver model could be more simplified, then it could be mass produced. If this could come true, then there might be a day when each house could watch Juna-san and the proposed Elfrieden's new public broadcast.

Let us return to the topic at hand. If you asked, why there are receiver units in the room with the Royal Broadcast transmitter? Because each of the Three Dukes also possessed the same orbs. And currently, each receiver units displayed the faces of the Army General, Georg Carmine of the Therianthropes; the Air Force General, Castor Valgas of the Dragonewts; and the Navy General, Excel Walter of the Water Dragon Tribes[2]. Surely, I and Liecia too were being displayed at their ends.

「.....To think that our first meeting to be like this. I am Souma Kazuya, the one who had been entrusted with the throne by the previous Elfrieden King, Albert-dono.」(Souma)

『Cih, so a pretense to be a fully-fledged King?』(Castor)

Castor immediately snarled at my greetings. However,

『Castor!..... I'm deeply sorry, Your Majesty, I am honored to have the opportunity to meet with you for the first time. I am Excel Walter, General of the Navy. Castor, as a man who belongs to the military, never ever forget to treat the other party with respect no matter what kind of person they be.』(Excel)

『Gugh.....I already know about that. Castor Valgas, General of the Air Force.』(Castor)

Excel immediately rebuked Castor, and Castor reluctantly gave his introduction. According to the report, Castor is Excel's son-in-law. That explains the power balance.

『Georg Carmine, General of the Army.』(Georg)

Lastly, Georg introduced his name and so the mutual introductions finished.

.....So, this lion person is Georg Carmine, huh?

He had such a burly physique that a normal person like me paled in comparison, a manly thick mane and the fiery shining eyes of a lion. Even though it was just a video display, but it felt as if he was right beside me. Such an overwhelming persona. I understood the reason why Liecia admired him, because of his attitude as a person who had served in the military for a long time.

『Duke Carmine.....』(Liecia)

『.....』(Georg)

Liecia, who was beside me, spontaneously leaked out a voice, however Georg didn't send a single look at it.

Without being engulfed by Georg's intimidating presence, I informed them with a direct tone.

『Now, I will give the Three Dukes my final counsel. After I had succeeded the throne, the three of you repeatedly didn't respond to my requests for cooperation. Nonetheless, the matter of suddenly handing down the throne yo me was something that Albert-dono had personally

decided, so of course there were people confused by this. Therefore, I never inquired about the reason of disobedience until now. However, from this point on, if you don't abide to my decrees, then I have no choice but to acknowledge your side as rebellion. Air Force General Castor Valgas, and furthermore, Navy General Excel Walter. I will hear your opinion.] (Souma)

『Haa? To abide you...』(Castor)

『Castor!』(Excel)

Castor reflexive answer was immediately rebuked by Excel.

『What you will say in this place will be considered as the words of the Duke of the Valgas Duchy! Your shoulders carry the fate of the Valgas Duchy citizens, you know! Please be careful to not make any careless statements.』

As expected from Duchess Excel Walter. So as to not make any imprudent promises to my side, she conducted herself. Her appearance was that of a young girl, however she was not called the Amazoness for not being well versed in both military and political affairs. Someone that I absolutely don't want to make an enemy out off.

『Your Majesty, there is something I want to inquire from you.』(Excel)

Excel began to question me in such a way.

「..... What is it?】(Souma)

『What does Your Majesty intend to do with the Three Dukes' territory?』(Excel)

Excel looked directly at my eyes. If I told a lie to her, she would immediately know.

「If you abide by me then..... I will not interfere in the Three Dukes' territory.】(Souma)

『Then the Three Dukes' Army?』(Excel)

She immediately counterattacked. It seemed that she had seen right through my aim.

..... I shouldn't tactfully keep it secret anymore, right?

「..... I will incorporate the Three Dukes' Army into the Royal Army to form a new United Army. In addition, I will prohibit the nobles to possess additional soldiers, except for the number needed to police the territory. The surplus soldiers would also be incorporated into the Royal Army. Because of this, I will abolish the Three Dukes' special privileges to maintain an army. It will be treated similar to other nobles' territory.」(Souma)

『As expected, it is this.....』(Excel)

『Haaa!? Do you want to put all the army completely in YOUR[3] hand!』(Castor)

Castor snapped at my declaration to requisition the Three Dukes' Army.

『Are you ignorant!? The Three Dukes' system is to prevent the rise of a Tyrant. If the King of this country become a Tyrant, then we Three Dukes will observe him, and then if it needed then, with the entrusted army, to depose him! Do you want to destroy his system!?』(Castor)

「If this is a peaceful era, then I think it is a splendid system. However, this is an age of war. In the North, the threat of the Demon Army is approaching and in the West, the Empire is putting pressure all around. Amidonia and Torgis are waiting with vigilance to aim at our territories and in the East, the skirmish with Seven Headed Dragon Archipelago Union doesn't show any signs to cease. This is the time to establish a centralized rule.」(Souma)

『If the center becomes corrupted, then what will you do!? Do you think you could just assert that YOU will not become a Tyrant!? If all the armies are put into YOUR hands, then who will be judging YOU!?』(Castor)

「The Citizens will.」(Souma)

When I confidently declare this, Castor was immediately taken aback.

「It is because this is the law system of this country. 『King』, 『Law』, and 『Citizens』, are three interrelated things. 『Law』 is a community's

collective value system, in this case, the community are the people who live in the same country. That's why 『Law』is the same thing as a 『Nation State』.] (Souma)

『Eh, ah..... Community? Nation State?』(Castor)

Although Castor seemed to be unable to understand and Georg was just closing his eyes while silently listening, as for Excel, she was nodding and said 『Please continue.』

「To put it into simpler words, it is a relationship that 『The King establishes the Law, the Law protects the Citizens, the Citizens acknowledge the King』. At the same time, it is also a relationship where 『The King abolishes the Bad Law, the Law judges the Bad Person, the Citizens overthrow the Bad King.』 But on the contrary, at the opposite end of this relationship, the Citizen couldn't establish or abolish the Law. Although the National Assembly could propose a bill to the King, it would depend on the King whether or not to enact it. At the same time, the King doesn't have any power to directly judge the Citizens.】(Souma)

For example, at the time when I gathered the Talented People, Aisha had performed a taboo for speaking directly to me as a King. Actually, I didn't really mind it, but even in case it was considered a problem, as a King. I couldn't punish Aisha for her impoliteness. As a Citizen, in the end., the one who would judge Aisha would be the Law. By the way, there is really a law to prohibit speaking plainly towards the King, the 『Lese Majeste』 Law. Excluding the case of legitimate self defense in case she suddenly assaulted me with a sword; she would be properly arrested and would be put on a trial. Since this is the Law that was established in this country.

「Furthermore, if the King could freely establish or abolish the Law, then the Law has no binding power to the King. So, the only one who could judge the King is the Citizens. In case a Tyrant appears, then to protect their lives and property, the Citizens have the inviolable privilege of the 『Right to Resist』: to overthrow that King. The King couldn't infringe on this right. That's why if the King trifles with the Law as he pleases, then certainly he would end up being overthrown by the Citizens.】(Souma)

『Wait! If you put all the armies below you, then the Citizens have no chance to succeed, right?』(Castor)

『What are you talking about? After all the army is made up citizens too, right?』(Souma)

『.....』(Castor)

『Even for the soldiers assembled below me, they also have the『Right to Resist』. If the citizens and the soldiers judged me as a Tyrant, then I will be rejected at once by them. This is the system already established in this country. Incidentally, while we are talking about『Right to Resist』, if you Three Dukes overthrow a Tyrant, what legal basis you would use to not be labeled as a『Murderer』or『Traitor』afterwards?』(Souma)

『Ughh.....』(Castor)

Castor became silent.

In exchange, Excel began to question me again.

『Then, Your Majesty. After the components of the Three Dukes' Army that watch each other have gone, what will happen after United Army exert their『Right to Resist』and oust the King? If in itself, the army had the power to overthrow the King, the Citizens wouldn't have any means to fight against that kind of army. In the end, wouldn't a United Army would only invite a junta dictatorship?』(Excel)

『Haven't I said it already? After all, the army are the Citizens too. Their actions are regulated by the Law, and so they can also be judged by it. The army has the military law; if they violate that law, they will be judge. The Law is watching the army after all.』(Souma)

The political thinker Machiavelli had said『No matter what kind of country it is, the most important foundation is an excellent law and an excellent military. Without an excellent military, an excellent law couldn't be enforced. A nation with an excellent military will always have an excellent law』[4]. Without the military, the law couldn't be protected. Without observing the rules of the law, the military may rampage. That's why a good country must have a good law and good military..... Again, I

believe that Japan can be considered as a good country.[5]

Of course, I didn't believe that everything could be controlled by merely binding them with just the Law. However, as a rough idea, I believed that there is no problem with it. With the fine details, I couldn't do more than dealing with training, promoting trusted people as commanders or building mutual trust with the army.

「Then, I hope this reply would be able to answer the question of 『What I intend to do with the Three Dukes' Army』, Duchess Walter.」(Souma)

『Yes. It had cleared up my worries. Even so, there is still one thing that I wanted to ask. I had heard about the new bay city that Your Majesty is constructing. When that city has been completed, what will happen to Lagoon City?』(Excel)

Lagoon City. The city of the heart of the Walter Duchy. The 『City』 that was the thing Excel and the Sea Dragon Tribe thought the foremost. It can be said that without a doubt, it could incite the wrath of Sea Serpents.

「The new city is planned to become a trading port with tourist attractions. Since from the point of secrecy, the tourist trade has bad compatibility with a naval port, it wouldn't have that facility. That's why from here on out, Lagoon City becomes a Naval Port, I will also entrust the construction of battleships to Lagoon City.」(Souma)

I would surely be able to separate Lagoon City to be the Port of Kure and the new city to be the Port of Sakai.[6] It is possible to coexist and co-prosper. When I explained this to Excel, she nodded.

『After hearing this, I now have a peace of mind. From here on, this Excel Walter as well the Elfrieden Kingdom Navy will serve under Your Majesty's command; we will abide by your order.』(Excel)

『Duchess Walter!?』(Castor)

「I give my gratitude for Duchess Walter's decision. Hereafter, I hope we could work together for this country.」(Souma)

『I will humbly obey.』(Excel)

Duchess Walter respectfully bowed her head. With this, the Navy has joined my side.

(.....Well, it already had according to the plan so far) (Souma)

(We were already informed about Duchess Walter's thought through Juna-san, after all.) (Liecia)

I spoke in a low voice with Liecia who stood beside me.

Duchess Walter is a lady with great foresight. When Liecia's father handed down the throne to me, she guessed that there was a reason behind it, and then established contact from the beginning.

The one who became the mediator was Juna-san.

Juna-san is a person dispatched by Duchess Walter. Juna-san used the talent gathering event as a means to approach me and then conveyed the thoughts of Duchess Walter. As long as I don't lay my hands on Lagoon City, she would gladly serve the new king. As she couldn't ignore the obstinacy of her son-in-law Castor Valgas, and the strange state surrounding Georg Carmine since my enthronement, to observe these people, she would act as if she was on the Three Dukes' side for awhile.

After I heard it, I guaranteed the autonomy of Lagoon City and the safety of the previous King and Queen, and after that, I conveyed my plan of action to her side (Although I didn't report the plan of absorbing the Three Dukes Army into the Royal Army..... It seemed that she had already seen through my actions.) To deal with the problematic situation after this, the Navy's cooperation is a must. Actually, even before Duchess Walter complied with my final warning, she already moved the Navy to the Royal Army.

That's why in this final warning meeting, Duchess Walter would abide to my rule and at the same time Georg Carmine already established that he was rebelling against me. So amongst the Three Dukes, the only one whose behavior that I couldn't read was only the Air Force General Castor Valgas. Of course, I already made preparations in the case that he would turn into an enemy, but..... So that there wouldn't be unnecessary victims, I don't want to turn him into an enemy if I can.

「Castor Valgas, Duchess Walter has said that she shall follow me. You also, stop your insubordination and cooperate for the sake of the country.」(Souma)

『I refuse!』(Castor)

『Castor!』(Excel)

Duchess Walter scolded him, but Castor was obstinate.

『You are suspicious looking. I had already protected this country for the last two Kings and I will keep expulsing foreign enemies and whittle down enemy territory for another one hundred years. Even so, why, without consulting us, King Albert suddenly surrendered his throne to someone who just popped out from nowhere like YOU?』(Castor)

「.....Why don't you ask the person himself?」(Souma)

I also want to know about it. After handing down the throne to me, at first I was only frantically working so I wouldn't be handed over to the Empire, then I was frantically working to save this country from its predicament. Because I was so busy, I didn't have time to think about it: why Liecia's father easily handed over the throne to someone who had just been summoned like me? Although it seems that in this country, a Hero is 『A Person who Leads the Change of an Era』, but would he really put trust on my worthiness to such extent?

『I already sent numerous letters to King Albert. However I haven't received any reply even up until now.』(Castor)

「In that case, I am also bothered by it if it as you say so.」(Souma)

『Weren't you the one who had seized the letters?』(Castor)

「I had never done such deeds.」(Souma)

『Hah? Then why?』(Castor)

Really..... I didn't know anything about this. Since I had been pushed with all kinds of works and responsibility, I also didn't have any reason to do so. Rather, what is the former King doing by not replying to the letter?

(Liecia, do you know something about this?) (Souma)

(That is..... Although this is something unrelated, when I was asked him to cooperate in persuading Duke Carmine, he only said that『Distrustful people will appear if I move. After all, Souma is already the King.』.....) (Liecia)

(What he was so obstinate for?.....) (Souma)

I didn't know what a person thinks about someone else.

Well, rather than the former King that wasn't here, it was about Castor who was in front of me.

「Then, what should I do to make you accept me as the King?」(Souma)

『Let's see.....a Dragon is a creature that only let someone who it recognizes to ride on their back. If you want me to abide to you then you, must show the appropriate power to do so.』(Castor)

Castor made a fiery statement. What was with that muscle head type reasoning.....?

「Do you understand that by doing so, then it would be considered as a traitorous act to the country? Regardless whether you abide or not to me, after the war, you will be judged by the Law.」(Souma)

『My air force wouldn't be defeated by something like your Royal Army! If you can do it, then prove it!』(Castor)

I looked in Duchess Excel's direction and she appeared to be greatly troubled. Then this is already..... in vain, huh?

「If you abide to my rule, then I will grant food aid and highway construction to the Valgas Duchy. I will also guarantee the safety and autonomy of your citizens.」(Souma)

『As a general, I will lay my life for the ruler that I believe in. That ruler is the former King Albert-dono and absolutely not you!』(Castor)

「Is that so?..... I only want you to please remember that before you are a general, you also carry many things on your back.」(Souma)

『Your Majesty, Castor is.....』(Excel)

Duchess Walter tried to put in a good word for Castor, but I raised my hand to stop her.

「It's useless. We can't take any more time than this.」(Souma)

『.....Kugh』(Excel)

Although I could understand Duchess Walter's feelings, the situation had already begin to move. I didn't have any more time to spare for Castor. Hah..... So I couldn't persuade the Air Force, huh? If I could persuade them, then the winning chance would be 99%, but with this, it would become somewhat a gamble. How bothersome.

「Then, I am sorry to make you wait. Army General Georg Carmine.」
(Souma)

『.....』(Georg)

I exchanged glares with the brave lion-faced general. I could feel a tremendous intimidating air coming over the monitor. If we met directly, then I think I would show my unsightly trembling feet.

「Well, I will not ask whether you will abide or not. Since when you received the nobles who had committed fraud, it was obvious that you had no intent to abide me. It will be useless to persuade.」(Souma)

『.....』(Georg)

「Therefore, I will only ask you one question. Why are you rebelling to that extent?」(Souma)

『Pride as an old warrior..』(Georg)

Georg answered my question in a direct manner.

『My age had already passed 55, this body could only wait to wither, but I earned the most superb opportunity. My wits will decide the fate of Elfrieden. A once in a lifetime chance, to accomplish big things that would be the legacy for posterity is a cherished dream of a warrior.』
(Georg)

「Only because of that?.....」(Souma)

Did he plot against me just because of a reason that was similar to what a 50 year old human would have?[7]

「Are you.....a fool?」(Souma)

『A foolish question. Someone wouldn't be suitable to be a warrior if he is not a fool. I will make you see my way of life.』(Georg)

「Isn't that more like way of death?」[8](Souma)

『It's the same thing. You live if you don't want to die. You die if you don't want to live. That is what a warrior is.』(Georg)

He said it in a firm tone that gave an impression of a lion's roar. Any further discussion would be futile.

「.....Then, please excuse the me who will step over that old tree.」(Souma)

『Even though the tree is rotting, it is a huge tree that had spread out its roots far and wide. A half-hearted resolution wouldn't be able to cross over it.』(Georg)

「If it is resolution, then I do have it.」(Souma)

If it is a resolution to have a hand in cruel conducts if only for a moment, I had already resolved it a long time ago.

「Georg Carmine and Castor Valgas, too」(Souma)

『.....』(Georg)

『What is it?』(Valgar)

「I have a proposal. I believe it's not in my or your side's real intent to involve the citizens that didn't participate in our fight. That's why, let's create a rule, 『If an opponent is defeated or captured, then the army under him will immediately placed under the winner』. This is a measure taken to prevent the army from revenging the defeated leader and so that the hostilities don't continue.」(Souma)

Hearing this proposal, both of them nodded.

『Fine.』(Georg)

『I don't mind. As long as I can knock you down, then I'm fine with it.』
(Castor)

「.....My thanks.」(Souma)

『Well then, excuse me.』(Georg)

「Wait!」(Liecia)

When Georg was going to cut the transmission, Liecia who had been silent until then, asked him to stop. Georg narrowed his eyes.

『So it's the princess.....』(Georg)

「Duke Carmine.....」(Liecia)

Even though they had called out each other names, they didn't speak any other words to each other. They were only looking at each other's eyes silently. In the castle, they are royalty and retainer; in the army, they are superior and subordinate; in private, they are a man who is respected like a father and a girl who is loved like a daughter. Even though I am ignorant of people's subtleties, I understood that even with exchanging looks, they could communicate with each other.

The two people were just looking at each other for a moment, but then Liecia suddenly unsheathed the rapier from her waist and then put the blade behind her neck. With a single stroke, she cut off her platinum blonde ponytail. Whuuuuuuuuuuuh!?

『『『.....』』』

The golden thread-like hair was fluttering down and fell to the floor. Because it was so sudden, not only me but the Three Dukes were also dumbfounded. Out of the blue, Liecia became short-haired, however the person herself showed that she wasn't bothered by it, and then pointed that rapier towards the orb and proclaimed.

「This is my resolution. I will walk together at Souma's side.」(Liecia)

Georg who was looking dumbfounded like me, before long started to glare and made a smile similar to a carnivore discovered a prey.

『I have received the Princess' resolution. In that case, please show your

resolution even on the battlefield.」(Georg)

「Certainly!」(Liecia)

Both of them had the face that they had understand each other, somehow. Perhaps it was some kind of communication between warriors that I couldn't understand, but anyway..... with this, the final warning to the Three Dukes had finished.

◇ ◇ ◇

「Your hair..... Is it alright for you to cut it?」(Souma)

After the conference with the Three Dukes was over, I asked Liecia as soon as we returned to the Government's Affairs Room. There was also Aisha, who had came back from Dark Elf's Village, Hakuya, Poncho and Tomoe who joined us in the room. Everyone were staring in awe at the change in Liecia, but the person herself seemed to not be bothered by it at all.

「Since I needed to make a distinction..... Does the hair suits me?」
(Liecia)

「Well, I think it suits you. Right?」(Souma)

Everyone spoke out while nodding repeatedly at the same time.

「It is dignified and superb, Princess.」(Hakuya)

「I think short hair also suits you.」(Aisha)

「I-I think it really suits you, yes.」(Poncho)

「You are lovely, Nee-sama.」(Tomoe)

They were unanimously praising Liecia (although not at the same time) so her face became red from being embarrassed. Then, after the atmosphere calms down, let's get down to business.

「Hakuya, what about the preparations?」(Souma)

「All is progressing smoothly. The 20,000 soldiers strong Royal Army under Ludwin-dono could be deployed immediately.」(Hakuya)
「How about the movement of Amidonia's force?」(Souma)

「They, too..... ar moving according to our assumptions.」(Hakuya)

Hakuya hid his mouth using his collar. Perhaps, he was trying to hide the smirk in the corner of his lips.

「Alright. Then what about Poncho and Tomoe-chan's sides?」(Souma)

「Y-yes! The military provisions preparation, are progressing without delay, yes!」(Poncho)

「Rhinosauruses' preparations have also been completed.」(Tomoe)

「Alright. The one that will influence how this war progress will be "transportation power". I have great expectations for both of your works.」(Souma)

「「Y-Yes!」」(Poncho)(Tomoe)

Both of them bowed with nervous expressions as I made a wry smile and began to walk.

「Souma, it's the time, right?」(Liecia)

「I can't wait to use my skills.」(Aisha)

I greatly nodded to Liecia and Aisha who followed me from behind.

「Now then, commence the conquest!」(Souma)

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I imagine the last part with Souma emulating Lelouch...

AND SO: CULTURAL NOTES:

Do you ever see a female character in Japanese anime or game dramatically cutting off her hair? This signals some kind of dramatic, life-altering change.

The Japanese woman with long meticulously cared hair is considered as one of the Yamato Nadeshiko characteristic. There even a saying that "a woman's hair is her life." This saying underlined the great importance of the hair as a symbol of womanhood. That's why if you see Japanese story set in ancient Japan and or many famous anime, many 'adult & charming' female characters had very long and ornate hair (even reach their

buttocks and really really ornate).

Thus, if a woman cutting her hair vividly represents that she had resolved to make a dramatic break with her own past: to divide time between “the old me” and “the me there is now”. Hence Liecia’s words of “Since I need to make a distinction.” It is to signal that this is a new her, Liecia who will walk together at Souma’s side...

Read the complete list of Important Haircut at TVTropes!

* * *

[1] 混水摸魚 (Japanese: Honsui Bugyo, Chinese: Húnshuǐmōyú). It's a Chinese 4 word proverb, meaning: Take the advantage of a chaotic situation to make personal gains. This is also one of the 36 stratagems of Sun Tzu also known as "Disturb the Water and catch a Fish.

[2] FUN FACT: I just know that the kou/jiao 蛤 from 蛤龍 kouryou/jiaolong is also used to refer to mermaid: 蛤人 / 魟人. Kinda fitting for the Duchess Walter, right?

[3] This is “TEMEE” In case you didn’t know, Temee is a rude way to refer to another person. It’s from Temae, crudely means, you who are in front of my hand... Now for the purpose of translating, imagine Castor said this in mocking tone.

[4] An iteration of Chapter 12 of De Principatibus.

[5] You may disagree with this, but keep it to yourself.

[6] Kure, Hiroshima is an important port where the dockyard built the Japanese Navy vessels and has a major Japanese Naval Base. Meanwhile Sakai, Osaka, is a bustling and one of the largest commercial ports in Japan.

[7] A midlife crisis in case you confused...

EN: I still think that he should just do what all people do at that age: Buy a sports car, go cruising for women young enough to be their granddaughter/daughter, shame their family by still insisting that they are young and cool lol.

[8] Souma make a jab at Georg statement. Georg mention “生き様” way of life, but Souma retorted with “死に様” substituting the first Kanji life (生) for death (死)

Chapter 4: The One who Cannot Move, the One who Begins to Move

(Author's explanation about the previous title)

『Fish in troubled waters / disturb the waters and catch a fish』..... The 20th of the 36 Stratagems of the Arts of War. It's a stratagem where you use the opportunity during the confusion amongst the enemies to gain an advantage to achieve victory.



Valgas Duchy's Capital City 『Red Dragon Castle-Town』[1]

It was a city constructed on a rampart in a clearing on the side of a slightly tall mountain.

As a capital city, its location on the mountainside made it inconvenient to transport goods. As for why they built a capital city in such a place, it's because the Valgas Duchy not only has Wyverns for war purposes but also for transportation purposes. Since the number of Wyverns was limited, they couldn't function as mass transportation, but one Wyvern could pull a gondola on the ropeway. There are also bus-like gondolas that connect each castle-city and are pulled by four Wyverns each. Since they could fly, places that are hard to reach by foot are not a big problem.

The Air Force's General, Castor Valgas castle, just like the city, was quite boorish. Even though its location already made it a mountain castle, it was also concealed behind a high rampart, so its defensive ability was frighteningly high. The mountain slope made battering ram carriages (a siege engine with large stakes to strike and smash the gates) and siege towers (a siege engine similar to a plank-like firefighting truck so it was possible to cross over to the wall) useless, while the high walls stopped the attacks of the infantry and cavalry. The only effective means of attack was an aerial strike conducted by Wyverns; however, this was the specialty of the Valgas House, so it could be said that this city was surely an impregnable fortress.

Moreover, Castor Valgas, who ruled this city, is an excellent general.

Even though Castor was bad in political discussions and the likes, he had already showed unequalled strength in the battlefield. At the great battle that had affected Elfrieden for the last hundred years, with the Wyvern Corps as the vanguard and he as the commander, they always led the attacks and mowed down the foreign enemies. And although his ineffectual intellect also caused many mistakes, his broadminded hot-blooded personality and his excellent strength were extremely appealing and fascinated his subordinates. To make it easier to understand his personality, it could be said that he resembled Zhang Fei[2] from Chinese history or Fukushima Masanori[3] from Japanese history.

Because he was such a person, the day-to-day governing of the city was left to his capable subordinates. Since it was obvious that if a person who was weak in administration tried to get in the way of the government, the results wouldn't be satisfactory. It might even be able to be considered as good in itself. Actually, the administration of the city was stable, and so, as long as their livelihoods were stable, the citizens would respect the ruler. That's why the citizens also supported Castor Valgas.

Yes..... Until the day the failure of Souma's Last Warning happened, that is...



Several hours after the failure of Souma's Last Warning:

At the northern end of the Red Dragon Castle-Town, in front of the gate that led to Castor Valgas' castle, the 『Red Dragon Castle』, large mobs of people had gathered. The mob of people consisted of those from all ages and genders; they clearly represented the full range of citizens that lived at the Red Dragon Castle-Town. The people were clearly angry and resentful, and yelled their protests to the soldiers that guarded the gate that leads inside.[4]

『Duke Valgas! Come out!』(Angry Mob)

『Answer us, Duke Valgas! Do you want to Rebel!?』(Angry Mob)

「Why did you reject the aid from the King..... even though my children are starving.....」(Angry Mob)

「I even had to sell my daughter as a slave to reduce the number of mouths to support.....Uuuuu*cry*.....」(Angry Mob)

「Damn you!!! Come out, Castor Valgas!!!」(Angry Mob)

The mobs yelled out various types of pent up resentment.

High up in the castle in his room, Castor Valgas watched the state of the mobs from a window.

「Shitt! Why in the world did it become like this!?」(Castor)

Castor kicked a chair near him and yelled. The wooden chair crashed into the wall and broke into pieces, but Castor's anger didn't calm down.

「Why?! Why do the citizens know about the discussion with the King!? Were there any spies mixed in!?」(Castor)

「Castor-sama.....That is.....」(Tolman)

A white haired man who looked like a butler, who had been standing earlier in the room for some time, timidly began to speak. His name is Tolman Bech.[5] As a matter of fact, he was the Chamberlain of the Valgas House and had been entrusted with the domestic affairs of the Valgas Duchy. The chamberlain was quite muscular because he had quite a unique job history: originally a former vice commander of the Wyvern Knight Corps, because of his high administration skills, he was turned into a chamberlain instead.

Curiously, Tolman was hesitant to inform Castor.

「It looks like the new King had..... broadcasted the negotiation process even to the Three Dukes' territories.」(Tolman)

「What did you say!」(Castor)

Castor couldn't believe what he had just heard. He couldn't believe what Souma had just done. It was common sense in this world that the citizens had no need to know the process of the negotiations. It will be alright to only inform them about the results of the negotiations. After

all, the powerless citizens had no other choice but to accept those results.

Even so, Souma deliberately let the citizens watch how the negotiations unfolded.

This seemingly inane conduct had roused the citizens. Castor could only grind his teeth in frustration.

『I only want you to please remember, that before you are a general, you also carry many things on your back.』

He remembered the words that Souma had spoken at that time.

(Did he mean this!? That bastard, what he really meant was about this!)
(Castor)

Castor had fallen into what was a seemingly simple plan. It couldn't be helped. This world didn't have any concepts of "Mass Media" after all. Despite the presence of the similar overtechnology[6] Royal Broadcast, the previous Kings only used it to dispatch the minimum information to the citizens. If the citizens are ignorant, then it would be easier to rule them. Also, since it would be hard to guess where the public opinion would move after receiving the information, there was no need to deliberately use it. Therefore, many people, including Castor, didn't know about the media's power in influencing public opinion.

On the other hand, Souma was a person who came from an age that is inundated by the media. He had already personally witnessed both the merits and demerits of the media's influence. "A certain nation has a Weapon of Mass Destruction!" By saying this, the Media became the trigger of the war. There were also incomprehensible media that for several decades continued to condemn their own local governments and championed their own preferred ideology.[7] Souma had already completely understood how the media could induce wars and caused citizens to look down at their country's government.

Souma was using the difference of this knowledge against Castor.

However, there were parts that Castor couldn't understand.

『Still, but why? Why are the citizens enraged? Even though I had

rejected the King's aid, they had already received the food aid from the Air Force's emergency food supply, right? The situation wasn't that bad compared to the King's territory!」(Castor)

Certainly the armies at the Three Dukes' territories held a huge amount of food reserves, and since the army had opened their storage and given food aid to the citizens, their condition wasn't that bad compared to the King's territory. This so-so condition was also the same in the Valgas Duchy.

However, the chamberlain Tolman sadly shook his head.

「The citizens wouldn't be able to understand that. Because of the peaceful rule up until now, they were worried that perhaps they would be swallowed up by the danger that would happen from now on. Thus, they resented you who had invited that danger.」(Tolman)

「No way..... The hearts of the citizens that had lived alongside me for so many years had drifted away so easily!？」(Castor)

Castor dropped his shoulders, crestfallen.

If Souma was here right now, he would answer Castor with a quote from 『De Principatibus』:

『If someone needed to choose one over the other, then it would be better to be feared than to be loved, correct? Men are covetous creatures that think that as long they could obtain a profit for themselves, then they could even cut down their beloved. Conversely, that fear would never fade as there is no one who is not afraid of being killed.』

(An excerpt from De Principatibus. Chapter 17)

Although these are blunt words, this was also the reality. If you were forced to hit someone and you had to choose between your friend and an uncle with a scary tattoo on his body, who would you choose? The majority of people would hit their friends. Everyone treasures their life, and if they hit their friend, then perhaps they would only need to frantically placate them to become friendly again. This was the calculation that that people had in their minds.

The citizens of the Valgas Duchy also had the same calculation. No matter how much they loved Castor, the Lord of the place where they lived, if he suddenly declared himself as a rebel to His Majesty, the King, they would immediately turn on him. Would their home now become a battlefield? Would they be considered as enemies of the Elfrieden Kingdom? Many speculations fluttered amongst the citizens. They became anxious when their lives and property were in danger, and of course the ones who received all their anxiety were the officials that became the object of their hatred.

「The number of protesters keeps increasing. It seems that they had also gathered in every city in our territory. Perhaps the Carmine Territory also has the same situation.....」(Tolman)

「Shit! Won't it be difficult to assemble the Wyvern Corps like this!?」(Castor)

Although the Wyvern Corps were hailed as the Kingdom's strongest unit, it doesn't mean that they were always gathered at a single place constantly. The high ranked ones were given territory for themselves, and the others rented rooms at these territories. So, the actual condition of the corps was that they were dispersed throughout many different cities in the territory. Although, the subordinates would gather if there was a proclamation,『Emergency!』, just like in Japan's Kamakura period[8], it would be impossible to gather them in these currently chaotic conditions. In this way, even if the Air Force became hostile, they couldn't mobilize like they used to. Souma's Information Warfare had herded them into a position where they could not move.

The appearance of the dejected Castor was seen by his daughter Carla from the shadow of the door. Castor's wife and Carla's mother, Axela, received the advice from her own mother. She divorced herself from the Valgas House and had taken Carla's baby brother with her when she returned to the Walter Duchy. However, Carla remained behind. Not only did Carla inherit some of her father's rough personality, but her pride wouldn't let her forgive herself if she escaped and abandoned him.

(The new King Souma..... Despite looking for a fight, he tried to decide

the match outside the battlefield, truly the most detestable opponent for a warrior. An opponent that Liecia trusted so much that she can even cut her hair for him.) (Carla)

Carla also saw the scene where Liecia cut off her platinum blonde ponytail. Liecia was her friend, so she knew about Liecia's serious personality. Her actions gave off an impression that she wouldn't hesitate even for a bit. She had already resolved herself to such an extent. Thus, Liecia who showed such resolution wouldn't be a half-hearted opponent.

(Currently there are 500 Wyvern Knights in Red Dragon Castle. The opponent is someone acknowledged by Liecia, so he certainly has already planned something. And the key to whether or not we can bite and tear that plan to shreds are the 500 Wyvern Knights.) (Carla)

Actually, at this point, Carla's leadership abilities as a general had exceeded Castor's, and she was trembling with excitement at the hunch that a strong enemy will come soon.



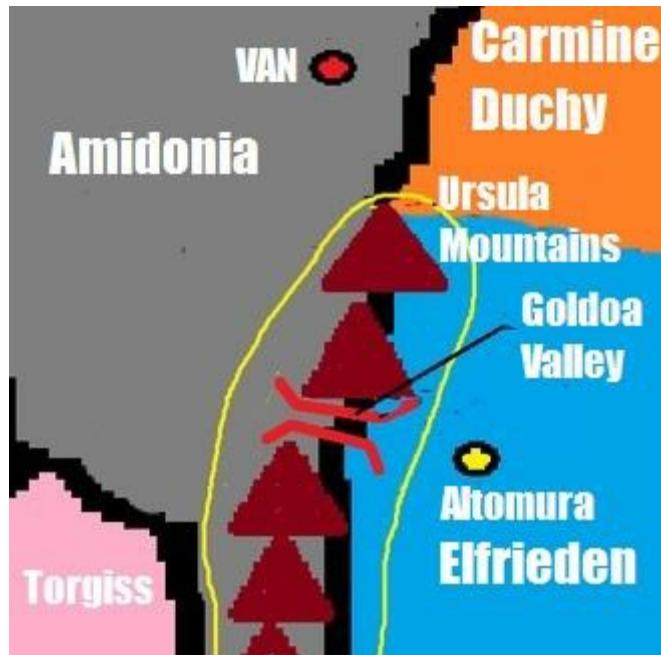
On the other hand, when the 50,000 soldiers stationed in the southern part of the Amidonia Dukedom heard the news that the Elfrieden Kingdom Royal Army had already marched to subjugate Duke Carmine, they immediately commenced their invasion of the Elfrieden Kingdom.

The large highway that entered Elfrieden from Amidonia split into two routes.

One route leads to Duke Carmine's Territory. Even if the road was open and easy for marching, Carmine's territory stood in the way of this road. It can be said that the Carmine Territory served as the Guardian Shield of this route. Since they had already communicated with its lord, Georg Carmine, they could brazenly walk down that route. However, the Amidonia Army didn't use it.

The reason was that the Amidonia Army told both the Royal Army's side and the Three Dukes' side (although the Navy had already separated) that they were the reinforcements for their respective sides. Because of

this, they could not take the direct route to the Carmine Territory, lest they would be thought of as supporting Duke Carmine. The other reason was because it was to their national interest if the war between the Royal Army and the Kingdom's Army could be prolonged as long as possible. Later, Amidonia's military intervention might be needed to achieve this condition. If, for example, they supported the numerically superior Kingdom's Army, when they achieved victory, the Kingdom would be immediately consolidated under Georg, and Amidonia would only receive limited rewards.



NOT PICTURED: The city of Nerva, since Spoiler!

For that reason, the Amidonia Army chose the other route that passed through the southern mountainous region. It was a route that passed through the Goldoa Valley halfway amongst the Ursula Mountains at the southern Amidonian-Elfriedenian border. The road in this direction is rugged, but after the crossing the valley, they would arrive at the outskirts of Altomura City. The melt water that flowed from the Ursula Mountains made this region the number one breadbasket of Elfrieden. It was a region that was formerly a part of the Amidonia Dukedom in the past.

Amongst the marching Amidonia Army, the Duke of Amidonia, Gaius VIII, and the Ducal Prince, Julius, rode horseback while showing off wicked smiles.

「Kukuku, it would be better if the King and the Three Dukes clashed as

hard as possible while we recover our lost territory.] (Gaius)

「Fufufu, that is so true」(Julius)

The sun darkened as they crossed the valley. Both of them couldn't stop believing in the bright future awaiting them ahead.

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[1] A castle town is a settlement built adjacent to/surrounding a castle. Castle towns were common in Medieval Europe. Some examples include Caernavon

[2] One of the Three Peach Brothers in the Three Kingdoms. Characterized as bold, fierce, resolute, impulsive, crude, somewhat unruly; careless in small matters but became smart about larger issues and strategies; brash and rough most times, but sometimes capable of great subtlety.

[3] A Daimyo under Toyotomi Hideyoshi and famous as one of the Seven Spears of Shizugatake. Often times said to have a simplistic personality.

[4] Good Lord... Souma just indirectly caused an Arab Spring?

[5] トルマン=ベッハ\Toruman Behha

[6] Overtechnology = a general term to refer for a technology or device that is beyond the natives technology or cultural level. Just play some Civ games...

[7] Souma refer to many opposition medias that circulated in Western-style Democracy. (EN: Think: John Oliver's show on HBO, the Daily Show and the Colbert Report for the TV counterparts.)

[8] For the European and American reader, just imagine French or England feudalism in Middle Ages, or for Paradox players, imagine Crusader Kings 2

Chapter 5: Lord of Altomura

[The Five-Day War]

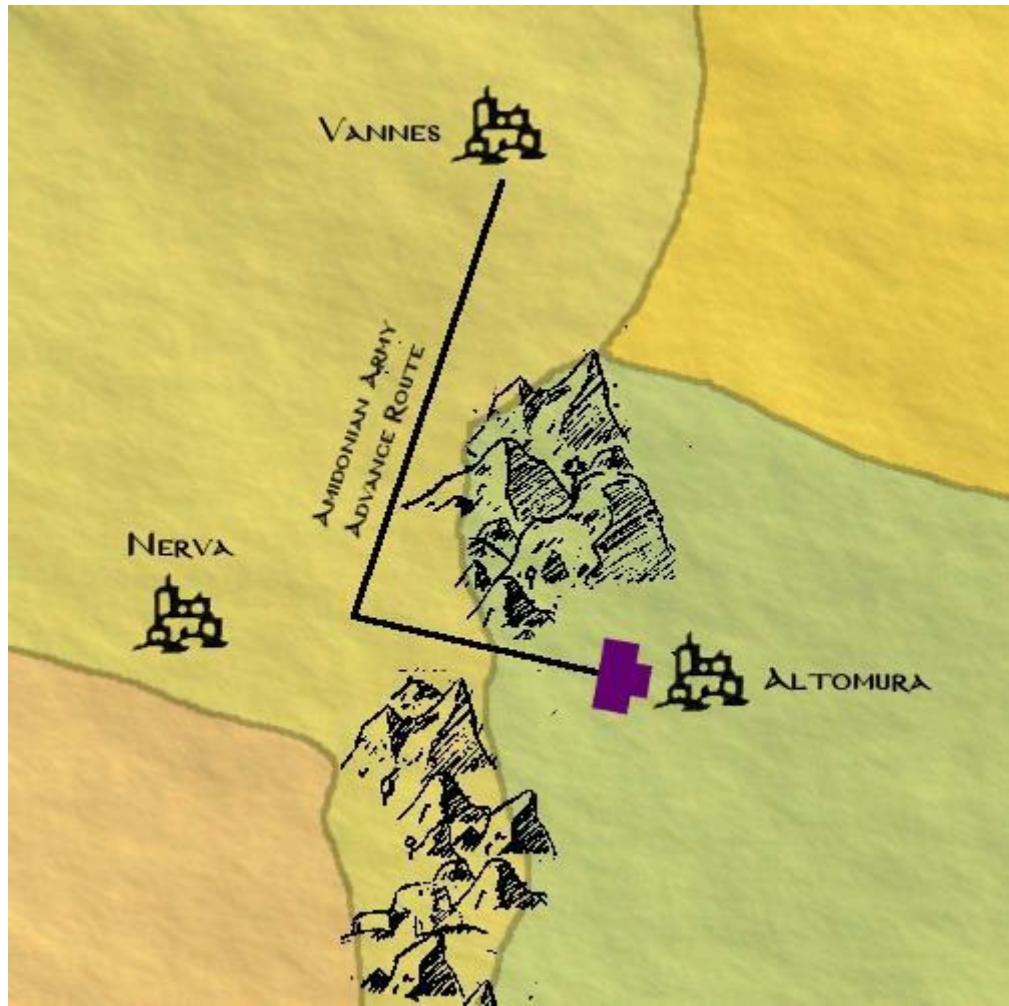
This war that in later years would come to be called thus unexpectedly birthed a large number of classic idioms – idioms like [as a fish to water] that originate in an ancient event. They come in various kinds, like strategies or maxims, but if the person they originate from were to hear of them, they would likely be able to do nothing but make a sour face. For to them, these five days were a frantic battle of life and death.



~ Day 1 – Noon – A certain place ~

In the slightly gloomy room, I was receiving a report of the [Principality of Amidonia Army Invasion] from Hakuya. On top of the large center table lay a still larger map of the Kingdom of Elfrieden and its environs. It was exactly what you'd call a war HQ. Hakuya placed a chess piece representing the Amidonian Army on the southern part of that map.





"The Amidonian Army invaded after crossing the Ursula Mountains. I was informed that they had left Gordoa Valley and are now besieging Altomura. They numbered approximately thirty thousand"

"Their total military strength is about forty thousand, right? They sure brought out a lot"

"They seem to have thrown all the troops they can move. They're staking their whole bet on this"

"Well, it's good that they didn't pass by Carmine Duchy. It would be a lot of trouble if they meddled in our fight with the army"

"That would be a needless fear. We properly 'arranged' things so that doesn't happen"

Hakuya said so in a composed manner. He was full of confidence but ... Thinking of the trouble the villages on the Amidonian Army's path went through, I can't really be happy.

"..... I thought it was an old and worn tactic, but it unexpectedly went well"

“Well, humans basically believe what they want to believe. Your highness must pay attention as well”

“I’ll take it to heart. All right then, how are the Amidonians going to move”

“After capitulating Altomura, they would sweep out the surrounding areas, They would probably want to secure the breadbasket region. Once they gained control of the region they would likely declare the land theirs”

To be staking everything on looting someone in a crisis.

“It might be expected of them, but How miserly”

“That’s because of the difference in national power. This is the limit for the military Amidonia possesses”

“I suppose so. How about the Altomura garrison?”

“Including the reinforcements we can send in, about five thousand”

Thirty thousand vs five thousand. That’s six times the difference.

“..... How long will they hold out?”

“It’s a fortress town sitting on plain ground, not suitable for defense. Added with the difference in manpower, they probably won’t stand two days of continuous siege”

“They will fall in one day at worst, huh?”

Which means if you consider information delays, it won’t be strange for them to have fallen already. However, this is only counting from when open hostilities began. I said to Hakuya with a smile.

“We anticipated this and sent ‘that person’ in, didn’t we?”

“It is as you say. It’s only a matter of whether they can hold out”

“Then we won’t change our strategy. We won’t ‘send reinforcements’ to Altomura”

“It’s a daring move, I think”

Hakuya bowed to Soma's decision.

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~ At the same time – Altomura Environs ~

At the time the decision was made by Soma and Hakuya, one man was grovelling in the headquarters of the Amidonian Army encircling Altomura. The name of this thin and obviously timid man was Wyst Garotte, the Lord governing this area. As a resident of Altomura, he should be the man leading the defense of Altomura, but because of the circumstances, he was now kowtowing in front of Gaius VIII who was leading the Amidonian Army. Standing next to Gaius VIII who was sitting on a stool, was the Crown Prince Julius. Gaius, glaring at Wyst, said.

"Hoo ... you mean Altomura will capitulate without resisting?"

"H, hyesh! We do not intend to oppose the Amidonian Army!"

Wyst replied with a slight stutter. Gaius narrowed his eyes.

"..... Let's hear your reason"

"Nothing else but because it's impossible for us to defend against you! Altomura is a town built on a grain producing plains region which is not an easy terrain to defend. We also only have the walls for defense, and only several thousand guards, too. Under attack by these tens of thousands of troops, it will only be a matter of time until we fell!"

Gaius looked toward Julius, to which Julius silently nodded, signalling that there wasn't anything strange with what he was saying. Gaius nodded, "humm".

"Then will you fall under us?"

"Yes. Without a way to defend ourselves we can only beg for Your Princely Highness's pity"

Hearing Wyst, Gaius grinned.

"Very well. Now open the gates"

"I, I would ask you to wait a little for that"

Gaius' eyebrows twitched in displeasure.

"Why?"

"R, right now opinion is divided between the anti-war faction and the resistance faction. There are some from the resistance faction who claims that they will [kill all Amidonians even if we capitulated], and even some from the anti-war faction are suspected of it as well"

"Hoo ... Would that be you?"

"T, that's unthinkable! I'm begging for my life here. Please don't be suspicious of me"

"....."

"But it is a fact that there are people with that opinion. Which is why I went into this camp first to listen to what your Princely Highness has to say"

Gaius gave Wyst's words some thought. What he said wasn't strange but then, should he believe this man's words or not. While Gaius was deep in thought, Julius interjected.

"Even if you don't persuade the people inside the fort, we can always attack Altomura, you know?"

"Yes. I understand that all too well"

Wyst replied to Julius while still in the prostrating position.

"However, there are fools who still doesn't understand that. I would not want Your Highness Gaius or your soldiers to be hurt on account of those fools. If you would allow me my life I will direct the opinion of the people inside"

Looking at Wyst bowing up and down like a locust, Julius wanted to spit on him in his mind.

(Damn opportunist. Have the Royal Nobles fallen this far. ... hmph, well it's obvious since even the Three Dukes' Georg Carmine became like that)

After Julius had calmed himself thusly, Gaius slapped his lap with a loud pop.

“Very well. If you capitulate then I guarantee the safety of those inside the fort. Get back inside the fort at once and get your act together”

Hearing Gaius, Wyst became so happy he almost flew.

“T, thank you very much! Then please, excuse me!”

No sooner than he said that, he left the HQ in a quick trot. While looking at his receding back, Julius inquired Gaius.

“Is this all right?”

“Hmph, if they capitulate then we’ve already won”

Gaius made an evil smile.

“I don’t need a mouse that cowers before the enemy. Once we’re done with him we’ll put his head on the gates as an example”

“Fufufu ... I see”

Julius also made an evil smile.

Gaius stood up from his stool and sent orders to all his generals to [Enter Altomura as soon as it capitulates and gain total control].

However, until the sun has set the Altomura castle gates showed no signs of opening.

“Ey! What is Wyst doing!”

Gaius became irritated. On the other hand, Julius calmly analysed the situation.

“Did he fail to direct opinion inside the fort ... or he might be plotting something against us”

“Goddammit! Let’s send in all troops immediately!”

“Please wait. If the enemy has a plan then it would be dangerous to attack at night. Also, if you consider the possibility of a surprise night attack, it’s better to harden defenses and wait the night. Once dawn broke

and we attack with full force, that town will fall within half a day.

Being rightly pointed out by Julius, Gaius lowered his raised fist.

"Uggh ... Can't be helped"

Gaius accepted Julius' plan and ordered his generals to wait until dawn to attack, but even while being relieved with Gaius' judgement, Julius felt a bad premonition coming from the direction of Altomura.

(I have ... a bad feeling about this. It's like we're being dragged, dragged down somewhere deep ... something like that. It doesn't feel like something Wyst Garrote would do, though ...)

The direction he was looking, Altomura, was eerily quiet.

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~ Day 2 ~

The dawn has broken. The night raid Julius feared didn't come.

Gaius VIII went to his whole army to attack, As planned. Just then...

[[[
UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHH
]]]

From within the silent walls of Altomura, an eerie war cry rose. It was so spirited that Gaius hesitated to give the attack orders. What in the world happened to Altomura that was so quiet yesterday? Did reinforcements arrive? Gaius' head was so filled with all sorts of questions he was unable to make a decision.

Meanwhile, a horseman rushed in from the direction of Altomura towards the Amidonian camp.

The one riding the horse was that Wyst Garotte. Wyst dehorsed so fast he looked like he almost rolled over, and kowtowed before Gaius with a face full of fear.

"Wyst! Where's your promise to open the gates for us!"

Gaius yelled at him and Wyst made himself even smaller.

"I, I'm very sorry! The people inside the fort had fallen into desperation, and it took a lot of time to persuade them"

"Ei, I'll have none of your excuses!"

Gaius unsheathed the sword he was wearing and thrusted the tip at Wyst's neck.

"Hiiii!"

"I'll have your head and make an example of it for the people inside!"

"W, with all due respect Your Highness. I know this is not for me to say ... but they have lost proper judgement being surrounded by these tens of thousands of troops ..."

While being terribly flustered, Wyst started making excuses.

"T, that war cry coming from Altomura just now was because of voices saying [Amidonia isn't going to keep their promises anyway so we're going to take them down with us]"

"....."

Gaius, who was actually planning to go back on his word could not say a word. The soldiers inside the fort were death soldiers, warriors with the resolve to die, which means forcing an attack would be risky. Death soldiers are like machines that'll keep on fighting for as long as they draw breath, so naturally, they inflict more damage than normal soldiers. They won't change the fact of Amidonia's victory, but that is exactly why he doesn't want to waste manpower here.

Unable to silently watch, Julius interjected.

"Father, there will be large casualties fighting death soldiers, we must avoid it. Let's show magnanimity here and let Sir Wyst go back and persuade them one more time, how about it?"

Wyst jumped at Julius' proposal, almost as if to say "I will stake my life on it!"

"T, this time, I will make sure to persuade the people inside the fort!"

Gaius pondered, but in the end he decided to leave it to Wyst.

"Very well. Consider this your last chance"

"Y, yes! Please leave it to me!"

"Hmph ... but how can we show our generosity?"

"In that case, how about lifting the siege once I'm back inside the fort?"

This proposal of Wyst's raised Gaius' ire.

"Raise the siege you say!? Are you making fun of me!?"

"P, perish the thought! Of course, it would be just for a little while! At least until noon, if you would lift the siege I can use Your Princely Highness' magnanimity to persuade the citizens!"

"Hmph," snorted Gaius.

"..... very well. I will lift the siege until noon. If you still haven't opened the gates by then we will force ourselves in. Is that clear?"

"Y, yes! I will surely persuade the people inside!"

As Wyst returned as vigorously as the way he came, Gaius promptly moved and lifted the siege on Altomura. Of course, in order to be able to immediately capture any forces inside the fort that might try and use this chance to slip out, he gave Julius the reins of a highly mobile corps and stationed them in front.

(Hmph, Altomura only has half a day left to live)

Gaius sent Altomura a gaze filled with hatred.

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~ At the same time, inside Castle Altomura ~

A woman was making herself at home in Wyst Garotte's mansion within Altomura. Despite being inside a city that was besieged by fifty thousand men, the woman was elegantly enjoying her tea. Seeing the woman's out of place boldness, Wyst who just came back from the Amidonia camp made a wry smile while explaining the details of the negotiation. There was not an ounce of his earlier disgraceful appearance

at the Amidonia camp in his face right now.

"Is this all right, mam... no, Duchess Ecksel"

"Yes. You did well. So Wyst can put up an act now, there's a good boy"

The woman sipping tea was the Admiral of the Navy Ecksel Walter. She looked to be in her mid-twenties but since she was actually a mizuchi who was over five hundred years in age, even Wyst who was in his fifties was a child to her"

"Duchess Ecksel ... would you please stop treating me like a child?"

"Every marine are children from my point of view, though?"

"But I'm not a marine any more"

"Fufu, no matter how much you go up in life, you will always be my underling and a child"

"Ah-, so am I going to be stuck with the child treatment for life?"

Even when the human Wyst became a graying old man, the youthful-looking Ecksel will probably keep treating him like a child.

"But That new King is something too, isn't he? To even make Duchess Ecksel do errands for him"

"His highness handles his people roughly. Even though I did swear fealty to him from the start, but to suddenly tell me to [take the Royal Broadcast orb and go to Altomura]"

Ecksel received the King's Final Counsel three days ago, not in the Walter Duchy, but here in Altomura, in Wyst's mansion. Because what was shown in the broadcast is limited, as long as one is in a properly prepared indoor space, one's whereabouts would not be known. Even if an Amidonian spy were to see the broadcast, they will surely think that she was in Walter Duchy. Soma made use of that and secretly sent Ecksel to Altomura.

Her job was to stall the Amidonian Army. He expected the Amidonians to first take control of the city in the center of the breadbasket region, Altomura, and do sweeping attacks from there to gain effective control

over the surrounding areas. Because he can't afford to send reinforcements and had to keep casualties in check, he had no other way but to hold them out at Altomura, and even then he had to avoid a fight as much as possible. Which is why the job fell on the sly old fox Lady Ecksel.

"The Amidonians would never have guessed that Duchess Ecksel would be in a place like this"

"It would take three days to get here from Lagoon City after all. Well, I have been here since five days ago though ... goodness gracious, His Highness sure handles his old workers roughly"

"Please don't use your age only when it's convenient"

"Self-derision is a good thing you know, though I absolutely won't allow anyone else to say so about me"

You're just as reckless as Duke Vargas! Wyst wanted to yell, but he kept it all in his chest. Even though he's already past fifty years old he still values his life.

"By the way Duchess Ecksel. I could only buy time until noon, will that be alright? Do you still need a little more time for the plan?"

"It's all right. If they would lift the siege until noon, they'll need some more time to get it going again. If they wanted to do a full-scale assault then that would happen at dusk at the earliest"

"I see. So there's nothing else for me to do?"

"Yes. Good work Wyst. Leave the rest to me and take a break"

Ecksel said so while smiling at Wyst like a gentle mother. Just by seeing that smile, Wyst felt like he could forget all the fear from when he was standing before Gaius VIII.

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«Elfrieden Classical Idioms Course»

[Lord of Altomura] ... figure of speech. Denotes a person who makes promises they cannot keep. The origin of the term was when the Lord of

Altomura, Wyst Garrotte, fell under attack by the Principality of Amidonia's Gaius VIII at the brink of the Five Day War, he repeatedly made empty promise to Gaius that he "would capitulate" in order to buy time. Usage example: "He's a L— so you'd be better off not believing him"

Chapter 6: Battle Outside Randell

[Make the host and guest exchange roles] ... number thirty of Sun Tzu's thirty-six stratagems. The interpretation a retainer supplanting his lord is more popular but there are also cases where it is used to denote a plan where the defending side (host) and the attacking side (guest) swap places. Because the defending side enjoys an advantage in a battle, it denotes the preferable situation where the attacking side would fight as if in a defensive war at the place they were attacking.



~ Day 1 – Randell Environs ~

It would perhaps be apt to call the battle happening in the environs of the Carmine Duchy central city Randell a [host becomes guest] situation. The Royal Guard who should've been attacking the Carmine Duchy was fighting a defensive battle against the Army who should've been on the defending side. Right now, hidden behind the walls inside the 'stronghold' being attacked by the forty thousand strong Army, Hulbert Magna was grumbling.

"Goddammit ... Mister enemy's way too persistent aren't they?"

"That can't be helped you know Hal"

The one answering him was Kaede Foxia who was likewise hiding herself behind the bulwarks. She was speaking nonchalantly in spite of the friendly and enemy arrows being exchanged, flying over her head.

"From how the enemy sees it, they woke up to find a fortress in front of their eyes, and even filled with the Royal Guard, too. So of course they'd be flustered"

"Well yeah ... that King sure thinks up incredible things, huh"

It was yesterday that Soma gave Georg Carmine his Final Counsel. As soon as the Final Counsel was rebuffed, Soma dispatched the Royal Guard to the Carmine Duchy, but the first thing they did was to build a 'fortress' right under the eyes of the Carmine Duchy's central city Randell.

"There was originally a fortress here where we would watch the Amidonians from, but the borders were expanded west in the antepenultimate King's time so it was torn down. The King made us rebuild that. Also ... the one here before was a fortress focused on defense"

Each and every one of the ten thousand Royal Guard that had been recruited by Soma for engineering works have now become excellent combat engineers. The earth mages used earth magic to dig the ground to create trenches, piled up earth to create walls, and used hardening magic to harden those walls. The soldiers dug and piled up earth using manpower, hardened the walls with primitive concrete, and used the machinery they brought from the capital for construction. It's common sense in this world that when one wants to build a fortress out of wasteland one would use only earth mages, but since the all common soldiers and not just the mages could also do construction work this time, the work speed was much faster than usual.

In addition to that, thanks to the addition of Tomoe Inui, they were able to transport materials and people in a short time thanks to the massive moving power of Rhinosaurus Land Trains. The materials were two-by-fours gathered from what was already there at the capital that they can install at the designated places at the destination. For this, he used the way Toyotomi Hideyoshi built the [One Night Castle] at Sunomata as a reference. To wit, he used the Rhinosaurus Land Trains in place of the Kiso River.

Then, despite the Royal Guard only having arrived on the evening the previous day, the fortress had already been completed by morning. From the Randellians' point of view, it was exactly that a fortress had sprung up overnight. In later histories this would be referred to [Randell One Night Castle]. The Army, busy dealing with the populace enraged by the Final Counsel televised like in the Vargas Duchy, could not interfere with the fort's construction.

"But still, you gotta hand it to Lord Carmine. He managed to gather the whole Army in Randell before the Final Counsel"

"Though we're now taking the attack from the forty thousand strong Army because of that. Anyway"

KABOOOM!

There was the sound of a great explosion. It was probably the enemy's attack magic hitting the walls. Even though they're strengthened with Kaede's corps' anti-magic, it won't withstand repeated hits like that. Hulbert picked up a nearby throwing spear, clad it in fire magic, and threw it through the bulwarks in the walls at a group that probably fired the magic earlier. The spear flew like a missile, hit a person and exploded, burning down the group.

After making sure of that, Hal went back to hide behind the walls and sighed.

"Aren't they attacking way too doggedly here in the west side? The other sides look like they only get sporadic attacks"

".... That would be the Zemish mercenaries. Probably the ones the corrupt nobles hired"

Said Kaede while peeking over the wall.

"The corrupt nobles literally have their necks on the line here. If they lose this war all they've got waiting for them is the gallows. They're desperate nandesuyo. It's the death penalty"

"You sure have a way with words. shudder"

Said Hal while throwing a second spear. It hit the mark and roasted another group of soldiers.

"GYAAAAAAAHH"

"Over there! Over there!"

"The flames, THE FLAAAAMES!"

Hal looked bitterly at the scene of the soldiers rolled around as balls of fire.

(Well, rather than fighting the Army where I have lots of friends, this is

easier on the conscience)

Hal had complex feelings inside, being formerly enlisted in the Army. Hulbert and Kaede who were close to the King were two of the few who had the complete picture of the war. Which is why they understood what the King was trying to do. They understood ... but still felt complicated.

“Hal!”

Being called out by Kaede, Hulbert came to his senses.

“What’s wrong Kaede!”

“This is bad nodesuyo. They, are bringing out that thing”

The thing Kaede was pointing at was a huge cannon that was now being brought into the battlefield. In this world where gunpowder weapons aren’t too well developed due to magic, only cannons were studied as naval weaponry. Despite being problematic because of mobility, the Army, eyeing its magic-less destructive power, possesses three of them as siege weapons, which don’t require mobility. Currently, in Elfrieden, only the Army was in possession of a ground-based cannon.

“..... speaking of which, we haven’t had reports of siege weapons being used from any direction”

“Well they normally don’t get used in the opening moves”

“So, what’s that then?”

“I think the corrupt nobles are getting impatient and took them out on their own nodesu”

“..... Isn’t this quite bad?”

“It’s quite bad nanodesu. Antimagic only works against magic and fire. For physical attacks there’s only this wall’s [ancient concrete] coated earth walls. It’s stronger than the normal ones but if they took repeated hits from that ...”

BOOM! CRASSH!

With an unnerving noise a shell flew, drawing a high arch. It hit the

wall and ‘sank’. The cannonballs in this world are lumps of iron. They seem to have thought up exploding shells but since it doesn’t give much damage to antimagic-reinforced walls despite its showy appearance, it doesn’t see much use. If it were Soma, he would’ve investigated, so the magical strengthening cannot defend against physical energy, but it can defend against thermal energy? Thus the fired iron ball is a mass of physical energy that is the weakness of this wall.

“W, what should we do nanodesu!”

“W, what should we do, but even if you ask me! Can’t you do something with your magic Kaede!?”

“I’m all out of magic because of the construction! Can’t you intercept with a lance, Hal?”

“The speed difference is too big! It’s like downing a loosed arrow with a pebble!”

“Humm. Then how about a bow?”

“” Eh? “”

When the two turned their heads, they saw a well built young¹ male Dark Elven warrior standing there holding a still larger bow. The dark elf warrior nocked an arrow to his bow. He then pointed it upwards and loosed.

¹ Though you can’t judge his race’s age by the looks

BOOM!

Once again, a shell was fired from the enemy camp. The dark elf loosed his arrow at nearly the same time. That moment, Hal and Kaede thought they heard a high whistling sound. It was probably because of the wind magic enchanted into the arrow loosed by the dark elf warrior. Two seconds later, the fired iron shell shattered into pieces in the sky overhead. Hal and Kaede dropped their jaws in awe.

“Humm. Much easier than downing a messenger falcon”

“Ah, who are y...”

“Ah, my. I forgot to introduce myself. I have come from the God-protected Forest, Thule is my name. Pleased to make your acquaintance, sir Hulbert Magna”

As he said that, the dark elf young man, Thule, smiled.

“H, how did you know my name?”

“Sir Hulbert might not have remembered, but that time when the great landslide disaster happened in the God-protected Forest, my daughter was among the victims saved by Sir Hulbert and the King. I later learnt your name because I wanted to thank you, but the first relief corps had already returned to the Capital ... that time ...”

BOOOM! CSHHING!

“So, I would like to apologize for not being able to thank you for saving my daughter”

“No, well, I was only following the King’s orders...”

“I still thank you nonetheless. My daughter who you saved was so taken by the sight of you saving people that she said [I want to join the Royal Guard someday and save lives like that person]. Even I can’t find anything to say to that. Ha ha ha”

While talking, Thule accurately shot down the fired cannonballs. The Elven races, to which the Dark Elves belong, are a race that excel in bowmanship, but he was still amazingly skilled.

“But then ... why is Thule-san here? You’re not in the Royal Guard are you?”

Kaede asked, and Thule casually laughed. Ha ha ha.

“I heard something big happened to the village’s savior King Soma. To pay back our debt of gratitude, the Dark Elf village sent us warriors to his side. We Dark Elves mostly don’t want to concern ourselves with the outside world, but this time there were no voices raised against it”

“That’s ... I thank you very much nanodesu”

“It’s give and take. You are the ones who taught us that”

Looking at Thule's face, Kaede felt her tenseness loosen slightly.

(There were more reinforcements than I thought nodesu. Then we might somehow live this through)

There were more than just Dark Elves coming to reinforce the Royal Guard. There were the former members who seceded from the Army, including Hulbert's father, Glaive Magna. They became a volunteer army, participating in this war under Glaive's command. Their forces, combined with the reinforcements from the Dark Elf village, numbered over five thousand. In other words, there are currently fifteen thousand soldiers defending the fort.

(I heard that in battle, the attacking side needs three times the numbers of the defending side. The Army had forty thousand. It would've been hard with just ten thousand, but with the reinforcements we managed to escape being outnumbered three to one)

Kaede rubbed her chest down in relief. Incidentally, after several years of growing up, Thule's daughter joined the Armed Forces as she declared and luckily came under Hulbert's command. One scheme after another happened after that and she came to Hulbert's family for marriage, this is definitely not a situation where Kaede can be relieved for, but that's another story². Right now Kaede was racking her grey matter just to be able to survive this fight together with Hulbert.

² «TN: I'm imagining Sherry from GATE with silver hair and dark skin»

“Kaede-kun!”

Being called on, Kaede looked toward the gates. There was a group of heavy knights there, man and horse alike clad in silvery armor. They were the Royal Knights who defend the capital and the Royal Castle. At their head was the especially prominent Captain of the Royal Knights and the leader of the Royal Guard, Ludwin Arcus. He was a golden-haired, good looking man, wearing a silver-white armor, and even riding a white horse. His good looks that can be called ‘overdoing it’ caused envy in Hulbert. However Kaede paid no mind to those good looks and approached Ludwin with questions.

“What are you doing here! Sir Ludwin is the Supreme Commander here!”

“Sorry Kaede-kun. Please take command for me for a while. We’re going to deal with that noisy thing a little”

Ludwin pointed at the direction of the cannon with his cavalry lance. Kaede held her head in her arms.

“You can just leave those chores to Hal or something nodesu!”

“Oi!”

“Ahaha, please don’t say that. Compared to the soldiers doing their best holding the fort, we Royal Knights didn’t have the chance to show our good side. We can’t look cool if this keeps up”

“Cool!? Are all men idiots nanodesu?”

“Hahahaha, so you do understand. We’ll leave you to it then”

Before Kaede can say another word, Ludwin gave out orders to the Royal Knights.

“Open Gates! Forward men, to the cannon! Return after it’s destroyed! Ignore the enemy soldiers, don’t give chase too far. Focus on destroying the objective!”

“”” OOOOOOOOHHHH!!! “””

“Pierce anyone in your way with your spears! Trample any hindrance under the hooves of your horses! We are the spears that protect the kingdom! We are the King’s Majesty! Run through without stopping!”

Then the gates were thrown open.

“Let’s go! We will show them that the Royal Knights is not just for show!!”

“”” UOOOOOOOOOOHHHH! “””

The Royal Knights rushed with the vigor of a bursting dam. The mercenaries fell into panic on the face of the sudden counteroffensive and their ranks scattered. There’s no stopping the Royal Knights’ charge now.

Some were impaled by Ludwin's men's spears. Some were trampled under the hooves of their horses. Most of them were the Zemish mercenaries that the corrupt nobles spent away their assets and gathered.

Mercenaries have significant personal fighting strength but they are weak at group fights. They fight by each individual's judgement without a proper chain of command. Because they were merely hired with money, they had no loyalty nor patriotism – when their lives are in danger they will simply flee. That was why they were bad when put against a group that moves with one will like Ludwin and his men. The mercenaries couldn't defend against a group individually, and they couldn't cooperate with their allies, thus they were swept away one after the other by Ludwin and were routed.

Then when Ludwin's men arrived upon the cannon left behind, they set it aflame.

(His highness is going to complain about budget later, but it can't be helped)

He felt it was somewhat of a waste but he judged this because he couldn't leave it be and he didn't have the leisure to drag the immobile thing and return. Behind the triumphantly returning Royal Knights, black smoke and thunderous roars erupted from the bursting cannon.

Skipping straight to the conclusion, the Army weren't able to accomplish anything today and decided to return to Randell at sunset. The war resulted in a win for the defending side but the Royal Guard were the ones who were originally on the attack. No matter how many defensive battles are won, the situation would get worse and worse until they were cornered. This fact was obvious to anyone that can see.



That night in the council room in the castle of Georg Carmine in Randell, several tens of nobles barraged Carmine with questions.

"Lord Carmine! What is it with this languid way of fighting!"

"Indeed. It is most unlike you, the feared Demon of the Battlefield"

“Weren’t we the only ones putting up a proper fight!?”

These were all the people who, as soon as Soma launched his corruption investigation, clearly antagonized the King and swarmed like flies on a flytrap to Georg’s side. For these people, who did not fulfill their responsibilities to repay³ and opposed the King, there was no future. If they were to be defeated in this war they would fall into ruin. That was why they spent all their private assets to hire Zemish mercenaries and challenged the Royal Guard.

³ The amount embezzled was too big for them to pay

However, from their point of view, the way Georg fought was unsatisfactory. The Army’s movements in today’s battle lacked motivation. They understood that the soldiers’ morale had dropped seeing the King’s Final Counsel, but Georg didn’t even urge his soldiers to fight. The attitude that was most unlike Georg Carmine, renown for his severe attacks, irritated the nobles.

“What a cowardly Army! The war with the King has already begun!”

“Show us the power of Georg Carmine that’s famous throughout the Kingdom!”

“Surely you’re not afraid after having gone this far!”

“Oh ...?”

Georg glared at the nobles.

“Who are you saying I’m afraid of?”

“Guh ...”

With just a glare and a word, Georg silenced the nobles. Georg looked around at the nobles that had gone silent, hit by the great general’s spirit, and sighed.

“Aren’t you the ones who don’t understand? The enemy only numbered in the ten or twenty thousands. The fortress built in just one night was surprising but by the way the gradual onslaughts are going, it’s them that will be cornered. There is no need to force an attack”

"I, in that case ... if there are only ten thousand of them why not take them down once and for all?"

"But that way you'll be the ones going into a total rout. Also, you took out three cannons from the Army armory and of all things got them destroyed"

"Uguu ... We deeply apologize"

Glared at by Georg, the objecting nobles made themselves small. In truth, the one who brought the cannons out into battle was one of the corrupt nobles who became impatient from not being able to attack. They threatened the custodian of the weapons using their name and forcibly borrowed them. As a result, they lost three cannons for nothing, and the Army no longer looks too fondly at the nobles' army.

Georg continued.

"There is also one other thing bothering me. There has been no sign of Soma in that fort"

"Wouldn't he be hiding in the Capital and leaving the fight to his men?"

"He's not that kind of King. If his whereabouts are unknown then he must be somewhere scheming something. Which is why we must lure him out"

"So you mean, the soldiers at the fort are bait?"

Georg made a big nod to the noble.

"I don't know where Soma is or what he's doing, but once he left the soldiers he dispatched to die he will be abandoned by the men and by the people. He will definitely show up eventually. When he appears we can pulverize him along with all the men in the fort"

Georg was a beastman with the head of a lion. When he grins he exposes his sharp fangs. Seeing those fangs the nobles felt chills running down their spine. This is a man we must not make an enemy of.

Georg rose to his feet.

"But you gentlemen must be tired after today's battle. This is a battle

that won't be finished tomorrow or the day after. The attacks will be conducted with just the Army, so you may rest for the whole day tomorrow"

""" Y, Yessir! """

Receiving appreciative words from Georg, the nobles bowed their heads and left the council room. In their place, a man entered.

"Excuse me Lord Carmine"

".... Beowulf I see"

The man's name was Beowulf Gardner. He was a wolf-headed beastman in black Army uniform, along with Glaive Magna who has now broken off with the Army, he was one of the two people known as Georg Carmine's two wheels. He was effectively the number two man for the current Army.

That Beowulf was laconically asked.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes! Nothing is amiss"

"Very well"

To the saluting Beowulf, Georg nodded in satisfaction and grinned.

"Then let's go meet the King with the plan we put all our might into"

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On the other side, at the Royal Guard camp Hulbert and Kaede were lining up next to each other having dinner. The menu was the [Instant Zelring Udon] Soma invented. It was something made by boiling Zelring udon and giving it strong flavoring, then drying it with hot air, and when it's time to eat, soaking it in hot water and waiting for one minute⁴, becoming a complete meal. The convenience of being able to be eaten anywhere so long as one has hot water and a cup made it very popular among the Royal Guard to whom it was distributed.

⁴ It seems to soak more water than instant ramen

"Being able to eat it while camping is *sssslurrrrrp* ... great isn't it?"

“His Highness said ... *slurp slurp slurp* ... [I wanted to fry it but it dissolves in oil! But I like the fragrance of fried noodles better than the non-fried raw ones!] nodesu”

“I don’t really get it ... *sssssslurrrrrrp* ... must be some obsession”

After finishing their food while having a conversation, Kaede leaned herself on Hulbert’s shoulder. Feeling the scent of Kaede’s hair right nearby threw Hulbert into a panic.

“O, oi, Kaede. What are you doing?”

“Fufufu. Hal, I’m really happy right now nodesuyo”

“Huh!? Happy why!?”

“Because Hal’s here by my side desuyo”

Said Kaede. She giggled.

“I’m glad Hal came over to the Royal Guard nodesu. If you stayed in the Army might have been frenemies nodesu. You might not even be here nodesu”

“But I’m surrounded by forty thousand Army members because of that though”

“It’ll be decided in one or two days nodesuyo. If we could stand our ground ...”

“If we could stand our ground ... ?”

“If we could stand our ground then everything will go swimmingly, that would be great, right”

“Don’t just mix in your hopes in the end! If you said that much then you should just say everything!”

“So, you’ll protect me, right, Hal?”

“Aaah, sheesh, fine! I’ll just have to protect Kaede from anything and everything!”

“You’re so reliable Hal”

Within the fort, right in the middle of the battlefield, the two cuddled together and smiled to each other.

~ Day 2 – Randell Environs ~

Dawn broke and the Army once again began its offensive.

However, unlike yesterday, there were only sporadic attacks from all directions. Arrows and magic did come flying, but there were no forces making excessive attacks. Hulbert tilted his head in doubt at this half-hearted way of fighting that was unlike the day before.

“The enemy’s attacks have gone tepid, huh”

“I don’t see Zemish mercenaries anywhere. The enemy might be switching to attrition tactics”

Kaede analyzed while watching the enemy army’s movements.

Hulbert turned his shoulders around.

“Then we could take it easy for a little while”

“Hal, you have to be on guard in a battle nodesuyo. You’ll get the rug pulled from under you nodesu”

“.... All right”

Then the Army’s sporadic offensive continued. When the sun was approaching its zenith, the soldier at the watchtower shouted in a loud voice.

“Large number of wyvern cavalry in the eastern sky!! It’s the Air Force!!”

When Hulbert and Kaede looked to the east, tense from the words of the scout, they saw thousands of wyverns flying their way in formation. Hulbert reflexively hugged Kaede. She laid her hand on his hands wrapped around her shoulders and gently smiled “it’ll be fine, Hal”.

“Our bet has paid off”

The wyverns passed by the fort where Halbert and Kaede were and flew towards Randell.



«Elfrieden Classical Idioms Course»

[Randell One-Night Castle] ... Tactics. Meaning [Use everything that can be used to achieve the goal]. The expression came from the events at the junction of Georg's insurrection, where King Soma used the Combat Engineers of the Royal Guard to restore a torn-down fort. A close synonym on Earth is number fourteen of Sun Tzu's thirty six stratagems, [Borrow the corpse to resurrect the soul].

Chapter 7: Crimson Dragon Castle Village Assault Plan

~ Day 1 – Crimson Dragon Castle Village ~

Even after one night since the Final Counsel conducted by Soma, protesting voices kept on increasing in front of Castor Vargas' castle in the Crimson Dragon Village. They probably came from all over the Vargas Duchy. If the protesters kept on increasing like this they would go out of control and there would even be risk of rebellion, so despite the Royal Guard already entering the Carmine Duchy, the Air Force were still unable to move.

Inside his residence at Crimson Dragon Castle, Castor Vargas was at wit's end. Castor, who shows unparalleled strength in the battlefield, was completely out of his depth with political bargainings such as this.

It is rare that the word [muscle-brain] would befit a man to this extent. Therefore it wasn't like he harbored ill will towards Soma. Even the reason he rebelled was from simplistic thoughts like If even that sober and honest Georg Carmine revolted against him then he can't be a decent person, if that kind of person suddenly became king and wanted us to follow him, then I will test his mettle in the field of battle!

But how was the reality. Just with one Final Counsel he was branded a rebel by the people. The [muscle-brain] was completely unable to deal with the sudden turn. Such a Castor was currently being watched with compassionate eyes by his steward Tolman and his daughter Carla. Castor gave Tolman, who was superior at political maneuvering than him, an entreating glance.

“Tolman ... can I solve this situation by going to the Royal Castle and defeating Soma?”

“.... Out of the question. You definitely should rather avoid doing that”
Tolman quietly rejected.

“Definitely, you say?”

"Then let me ask you this Milord. Do you wish to take the crown for yourself?"

"I couldn't possibly do that"

"Then can Milord settle the country's politics after King Soma died?"

"Of course not. I even had to leave the Duchy's administration all to you"

"Then you certainly can't attack. Lord Carmine might be able to pacify the country, but Milord certainly can't do that. If Milord kills the King without becoming King yourself, then Milord would only become a liege-killer and become the enemy of the whole Kingdom. If he were a wicked King then you can claim justice but Soma's reign is largely popular"

His Lord Castor held antipathy towards Soma, but that sentiment probably had an element of [prejudice] contained within. Soma had both the reformist disposition he showed through the Royal Broadcast and the non-idealistic realistic pragmatism, a rare kind of King. That kind of King was sure to make the old-fashioned Castor anxious. In that aspect, the flexible Tolman gave proper judgement.

"Sir Tolman, how about raiding the capital and favoring His Highness the previous King? If we installed Alberto-dono then we could prove our lawfulness, can't we?"

Castor interjected Tolman who was making a calm analysis of the situation. However Tolman shook his head and simply said "no".

"It's another matter if he were forcibly removed, but Lord Alberto's abdication was by his own will. Also, his daughter Princess Liecia actively supports the new King. If we appealed him for cooperation I'm sure he would shake his head"

"Uguu..."

Castor too had seen the scene where Liecia showed her resolve for Soma's sake against Georg whom she idolized like a father that she even cut beautiful hair. The resolve Liecia showed even made Carla recognize anew that [the new King Soma was a great statesman and never an

usurper]

Castor became perplexed again.

"Then what should we do now"

".... There are only three things we can do"

"Three things? Let's hear it"

"First is a frontal attack. We join forces with Georg Carmine's Army, and attack the capital together with him. If it's Sir Georg, he should be able to consolidate the Kingdom"

"That would be the best thing to do if we could, but ... it's impossible with our situation now"

With how the town was in disorder and the troops couldn't be properly moved, it was impossible to join forces with the Army. Furthermore, there was no end to this chaotic situation in sight. If this continues the Air Force might have to sit out the war and follow the conclusion of Soma and Georg's battle. No, it was actually better if they concluded quickly. If they dragged it out the only ones who would profit are the Amidonians encroaching from the southwest.

Understanding that, Tolman immediately scrapped the plan.

"Second, this is the safest and the one with least casualties"

"W, what?"

"Milord should go apologize to His Highness. Earnestly. Kowtow"

"What!?"

Castor was at a loss for words, but Tolman continued disinterestedly.

"Since Milord already denied the Final Counsel Milord probably won't come out of it unpunished, but Milord will at least keep Milord's life. If Milord retires and hands over the family headship to Lady Carla or her younger brother and all goes well, the family name might even continue"

"I refuse!"

The straight-out refusal came from Carla.

"You're saying we should beg for our lives to an opponent we've already decided to fight, to sacrifice father so that the family name may remain? That's just the same as destroying the proud family name"

"This one's the safest, though ..."

Tolman breathed a sigh. He wanted this plan to be accepted, but well, a person who would accept this plan wouldn't have gone and opposed the King based on emotions alone to begin with. Which is why he understood that they wouldn't accept it.

"Then third, reconcile with the King"

"How is that different from the other one?"

"The second one is about acknowledging your loss. This one is a draw. Suspend the war to find a point both sides can compromise on. Right now it's [vassalage in return for recognition]"

"..... But will that King accept that?"

Someone who had already flown the banners of rebellion once won't be easily pardoned, or possibly being watched for another possible treachery. Thinking so, Tolman nodded.

"Yes. It would be difficult. If rebels were forgiven so easily he won't be able to discipline the other retainers"

"Then ..."

"Then, for this plan, we would need to [capture the King alive]"

Tolman said with his face as the second in command of the Air Force.

"If we could capture King Soma alive he would accept our demands to some extent. In that case reconciliation might be easy, I think"

"... It's easy to say, but we can't move right now, you know. How are you saying we should capture Soma in this situation?"

Castor tilted his head, Tolman spread out a map and explained.

"According to reports by the wyvern scouts, there doesn't seem to be anyone resembling the King among the troops heading for Carmine. I

think King Soma is moving separately as a detached force, and his target is most probably ... Our duchy”

“Hold on a minute. The Royal Guard is heading for Carmine, right? Call him a detached force, but he doesn’t have any more troops left does he?”

“That I do not know. He could have borrowed soldiers from the Navy or befriended some of the nobles and borrowed their private armies, or he could possibly have had some kind of scheme prepared. However, it is the truth that they could not allow our Air Force to move. We should think that he has some other trick prepared other than inciting the populace”

“... and we catch him there”

“Very well. If it’s only on the level of the Navy or private armies, the forces we have are enough to bite into them”

slap, Castor slapped his knees.

“We can solve everything with strength, this is a plan best suited for us! Let’s go with this. Which means that we only need to wait until the fake King Soma comes to the Crimson Dragon Castle Village!”

Castor smiled happily.

“... No, they’re already here father”

Carla’s face turned serious. The next moment.

[This is a message for the residents of Crimson Dragon Castle Village]

Soma’s voice was heard throughout the Crimson Dragon Castle Village.

◇ ◇ ◇

[This is the Acting King of Elfrieden Soma Kazuya speaking. Castor Vargas has, in spite of repeated Counsels, refused to show willingness to fealty to Us. Consequently, We are therefore branding Castor Vargas a rebel, and an assault on his abode, the Crimson Dragon Castle is in order. We will delay it for one hour from now on account of the common citizens, so during that time, please evacuate the Crimson Dragon Castle Village]

Soma's speech, delivered through the Royal Broadcast in a loud volume, threw the citizens into an uproar. Even the citizens raising voices protesting this verdict scattered like ants. Surely that was due to the confusion coming from the citizens trying to escape the Crimson Dragon Castle Village. Castor looked at the situation bitterly through his window.

"Damnations! What the hell is he thinking, rousing the citizens to escape!"

"I guess he's saying he doesn't need the people to hold us back anymore"

Castor frowned at Tolman's analysis.

"Are they going to start something?"

"Probably. But I can't say what that may be ..."

"But I have not heard reports of any military forces heading this way"

"... that is indeed the problem"

Of course, even Tolman couldn't tell what Soma was thinking. They had sent out wyvern scouts earlier but they didn't see any signs of an army coming. Yet Soma declared that he would assault the [Crimson Dragon Castle] in one hour. It might have been a bluff, but in that case, he couldn't understand the reason why he would send the citizens to escape. If he only wanted to buy time then letting the citizens surround the castle would be more effective.

(Wait ... Soma did say he wanted to attack the [Crimson Dragon Castle])

Tolman felt a slight discomfort at those words. That's right ... If he wanted to attack this place then he would've said to attack the [Crimson Dragon Castle Village]. The towns of this country were walled and unified with the castles after all. Yet Soma said he would attack the [Crimson Dragon Castle]. Which means he's saying he wouldn't attack the town but precisely assaulting this castle. If it wasn't just a mistake in wording, then the action he would take would be

Having gone that far, Tolman's train of thought was interrupted again by Soma's voice.

[Can you hear me, Castor Vargas?]

It was an unassuming voice, unlike before. The voice came from a receiver placed in one corner of the room. Soma's face was displayed there. Soma would usually pay no mind as to what he was wearing but now he was clad in the uniform for Kings going to war. It was dim and indiscernible, but he seems to be inside a small room. Castor prepared his orb and stood in front of it.

"... I can hear you, false king Soma"

[Right]

Though being called a false king, Soma's expression didn't change. Rather, he seemed as if he was looking at something insignificant, with cold eyes. Those eyes sent slight chills down Castor's spine.

[This broadcast is sent to your place only. I'm not broadcasting it everywhere like I did yesterday]

"Tch ..."

Castor clicked his tongue. He had gone through lots of trouble because the Counsel was made public.

"So, what does the King want? You're going to attack, aren't you?"

[I thought I'd at least give you one last chance to beg for your life ... I guess that's out of the question]

"Of course it is! If you want to attack, then come! But then again, you don't look like you have the troops to attack Crimson Dragon Castle Village"

Castor provoked. Soma snorted.

Soma's attitude enraged Castor.

"What's so funny!"

[I never said I was going to attack 'Crimson Dragon Castle Village'. To

begin with, I can just attack and capture you. All I need to attack is the 'Crimson Dragon Castle']

"You, what are ..."

[... It's time. I'll show you. Main battery number 1 and number 2, FIRE!]

Then two loud booms came from a distance. Then the next moment.

KABAAAM!!!!

A large quake shook the Crimson Dragon Castle along with the sound of explosions. The attack was like an earthquake from directly underneath. The room's furnishings tumbled, hung paintings fell, and Tolman and Carla fell on their backsides. Having somehow stood his ground, Castor yelled.

"W, what was that! What happened?"

Then one of the Air Force officers came rushing into the room.

"Lord Vargas. C, cannon!"

"Cannon!? The Royal Guard isn't supposed to have cannon!"

Within the armies of Elfrieden, only the Army owned cannons for use in land battles, and only three of them at that, for use in castle sieges. He never ever heard of the Royal Guard having them. Could they have made some new ones, Vargas thought, but they cost a lot of time and funds. It was unthinkable that they would be made in such an economically distressful time.

However, Soma calmly declared.

[No. They've been with the Royal Guard since even before I was made King]

"Impossible! That couldn't ..."

"Reporting!"

At that moment, yet another officer came rushing in with an unbelievable report.

"We have detected the battleship [Alberto] in the forest in the southern

plains!!”



Battleship [Alberto]

The only seagoing vessel of the Royal Guard, crowned with the name of the previous King. She was the flagship of the kingdom's naval forces. She was similar in form to the flagship of the combined fleet during the Battle of Tsushima, the Mikasa. She was propelled not by internal combustion engines, but drawn by two sea dragons lined up like a horse drawn carriage. However, now that she was on land, there was obviously no sign of sea dragons who live in the sea. Also, she currently had a total of four main cannons on its fore and aft. Those were the cannons that assaulted the Crimson Dragon Castle just now. Now that the battleship had been brought to land, she had become an artillery battery.

KABOOOM!!!

Another four shells were fired onto the Crimson Dragon Castle.

“Guh ... ridiculous! Why is the Alberto here on dry land!?”

[Don't underestimate the Royal Guard's transport capabilities. A single Rhinousaurus could pull a battleship with ease if you put wheels underneath]

“You dispatched a battleship on land!?”

What an outrageous idea. Castor felt like he was seeing the Devil. If Castor was a little more of a modern person well acquainted with weaponry, he would have thought the battleship was simply being used like a railway gun¹. However, to a person in this world where the idea of a railway gun simply didn't exist yet, Soma's action was like the work of the gods or the devil.

¹ A normally difficult to move large cannon made capable of being hauled long distances by mounting it on a train.

“You ... what are you!”

[An ordinary human being. A powerless man on the streets who

desperately racks his brains out]

“Kuh, don’t make fun of me!”

[I’m not making fun of you, Castor. I’m just angry]

As he said that, Soma’s eyes turned serious.

“Hmph! Because I won’t follow you?”

[No, because you are just being manipulated²]

“Huh? What are you talking ...”

[Everyone is. Including me. We’re all being manipulated some way or another. But I’m going to dance by my own will. Unlike you who only dance because you were carried by the flow]

“What, what are you talking about!”

² «TN: odosareru: being manipulated / being made to dance»

“No need to put up with the enemy’s nonsense, father!”

Carla interjected in between Soma and Castor.

She then turned towards Castor and said

“Father! It seems that the castle’s attacks came only from the battleship Alberto! I will lead the wyvern units and silence that battleship!”

“Wait, Carla! We still don’t know if there are any more traps somewhere!”

“Which is why I will be going! Father should stay in the castle, just in case!”

Carla flew away, not listening to Castor.

Castor clicked his tongue.

“Damnations. She wouldn’t listen to me when I tell her to stop. Just who does she take after?”

“... You can say that again. I’d like to see what her parents look like”

Tolman said sarcastically, but Castor didn’t have the spare energy to

pay it any mind.

“Please Tolman. Watch Carla so she doesn’t do something reckless”

“... I suppose it can’t be helped. I shall take my leave then”

Tolman chased after Carla. Left alone in the room, Castor glared at Soma’s face in the monitor.

“Wyverns are coming your way as we speak. We will have you shed your skin of disguise!”

[Skin of disguise ... is it?]

However, Soma only reacted to Castor’s declaration with a faint smile.

[It’s not exactly skin ... but the golden cicada has shed its shell]³

³ «TN: Sun Tzu’s thirty-six stratagems number 21, Slough off the cicada’s golden shell. Leave off one’s distinctive traits behind and become inconspicuous»

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The wyvern cavalry led by Carla took off to the sky in good order.

They would use wind magic to reach an altitude higher than the cannonballs could reach, regroup there and swoop down to attack. Once they had regrouped, Tolman’s wyvern came in close to the wyvern Carla was riding⁴ when she was about to give the attack order.

⁴ Although Carla herself, being a dragonewt, could fly on her own, she would normally ride a wyvern to give the battle her full concentration

“Milady. Please wait”

“What’s wrong Tolman”

“Something’s amiss. Even though we’re this high we can’t see any of the enemy’s follow-up movements. It looks like the enemy’s forces are really just the [Alberto]”

Tolman looked doubtful. Carla cocked her head.

“We already received that report, right?”

"Yes. However, I think they might be hidden or have a flying column lying somewhere. Milady, do you think you can take over a castle with only siege weapons?"⁵

"You can't? Sorry, I'm not too familiar with land battles"

⁵ «TN: siege weapons can't capture cities in CiV, but ships can (melee ships anyway)»

"It can't be done. Even if you would be able to attack the castle, you would need other units with higher mobility to take control of it. However, I can't see any of those units among the enemy"

"Which means ... what?"

"I don't know. But doesn't it mean that the enemy is planning something?"

Carla thought for a little while, but then shook her head.

"Even so, the Crimson Dragon Castle is being bombarded even now. To secure father's safety it is urgent that we destroy that battleship"

"That is ... as you say, but ..."

Seeing Tolman unable to reply, Carla raised her right hand high.

"Attack target is battleship [Alberto]! Capture target is fake King Soma!"

[[[OOOOO!!]]]

To Carla's command, the brawny Air Force men raised their voices. Compared to the other armies, the Air Force, being led by a muscle-brain, put focus on force supremacy. To the air force, might makes right, power is absolute, and tactics can be left to the other forces. The Air Force themselves simply tear down the enemy before their eyes with strength. Which is why the Air Force officers and men highly respected the Vargas father and daughter pair with their overwhelming strength.

"Commanding all dragons! Descend! Rush! Overrun!"

That highly respected Carla swung her right hand down, and the Air

Force soldiers began swooping down onto the battleship [Alberto]. On the field, the Air Force's sure-kill tactics are to do a nose dive while at the same time release the dragons' [Flame Breath] attack, then swoop back up and withdraw. Normally one wouldn't be able to deal with this high-power high-maneuvrability attack using ground-based equipment.

The battleship Alberto's main armaments wouldn't be able to deal with the speed, and her armor wouldn't be able to stand for long in the face of the wyverns' attack. Which is why battleship [Alberto]'s destruction was just a matter of time ... or that was how things should have gone.

shwump *shwump* *shwump* *shwump* *shwump* *shwump*
shwump

“What! Arrows!?”

“Ughaa, my shoulder ...”

“My dragon's hit! I, I'm falling! Somebody, help ...”

“Take cover! Take coveeeeerr!”

A rain of arrows from the battleship [Alberto] was launched onto the swooping dragon cavalry. Unable to bear the volley of arrows like a torrent of rain rising from the earth, the dragon cavalry climbed back up. With just this one attack several wyverns fell, and there are those among the ones who were able to safely withdraw that had anguished faces from having an arrow lodged somewhere on their bodies.

Looking at the terrible scene, Carla rammed her fist on her knee.

“What are those arrows! Such numbers!”

“They reached wyvern cavalry who were still hundreds of meters in the air. This was not a human feat. And those numbers ... I think they might be anti-air machine ballistae endowed with wind magic”

Tolman analyzed as calmly as he could. Carla scrunched her eyebrows.

“Machine ballistae!? Why are those things loaded on a ship!?”

Anti-air ballistae weapons that can fire off several tens of wind magic enhanced exceptionally high range arrows a second, a weapon specialized

for anti-wyvern battles. Normally installed on castle walls, having them on board ships was unheard of. The reason was because of one of the differences between dragons and wyverns – dragons do not fear the sea while wyverns do. Wyverns have the nature of being startled and going out of control when they saw ocean without land in sight. In other words, there would be no fighting between land-based wyverns and sea-based battleships, and therefore battleships do not need to be equipped with anti-wyvern weaponry.

“That false king even expects to fight wyverns on the sea!?”

“He probably appropriated some from a fort somewhere. Which means that battleship is now already a small fortress. What a nuisance”

Carla clicked her tongue, having listened to Tolman’s analysis.

“Damnations... what should I do”

“I wonder ... even though you can call it a small fortress it’s still battleship-shaped. I think it still has the same blind spot”

“A battleship’s blind spot?”

“Between the deck and the waterline. Battleships do not have a means of attacking anything lower than their decks. In case of the Alberto, the space between the ground and the deck is a blind spot. Which means if we were to attack the ship ...”

“We only need to approach flying low!”

Carla rejoiced having obtained a good plan. Flying low with wyverns is usually an act fraught with the danger of eventually crashing onto the ground, but these were skilled Air Force units.

“Listen up! All units, fly low and approach the [Alberto]! Speedily neutralize the main cannons and the anti-air ballistae and all other weaponry!”

“Understood, but only the weapons? Wouldn’t it be faster to just pulverize the whole battleship?”

One of the wyvern soldiers asked. Carla shook her head.

"I think Soma's on that ship. If we kill Soma we could no longer pacify the people and father would carry the disgrace of being a liege-killer. We need to capture Soma alive"

"That's difficult isn't it ..."

"Though it's a lot of trouble for you all, please"

As Carla bowed her head, the men beat their chest hard.

"Leave it to us, Milady"

"We will be sure to capture the false king Soma!"

Carla nodded to the men's response. She once again called the assault, "Attack!" then all the wyvern cavalry, as if they were shot down, plunged head first straight down. They restored their postures right before hitting the ground and flew low, as if creeping along the ground. As might be expected from soldiers who had strict training day in and day out, not a single one of them fell away from the series of manoeuvres.

With Carla at the lead the wyvern cavalry maintained their low altitude and headed straight for the [Alberto]. As Tolman surmised, the rain of arrows didn't come. Carla confirmed by eyesight where the anti-air machine ballistae were deployed.

"Found them! All units, attack the enemy's weaponry as planned! We don't know where Soma is hiding so don't destroy anything needlessly!"

"" Aye! ""

"Let's go ... Fire!"

On Carla's order the wyverns let loose breaths of fire, hitting and destroying all the [Alberto]'s weaponry. The next moment, the [Alberto]'s main cannons installed at the fore and aft exploded and the machine ballistae burned down⁵. Having destroyed the [Alberto]'s weapons in an instant, the wyvern cavalry climbed up as if riding the smoke rising up from her. Confident in her victory, Carla elegantly circled with her wyvern.

⁵ Explosions depend on whether there was gunpowder or not

“Right! Now storm the [Alberto]! Secure Soma!”

“”” OOOOOO! “””

“.....”

Only one among the elated wyvern cavalry expressed a dubious face.

(... This is strange. Even though the [Alberto] has secondary armaments, only the main and anti-air weapons were used during the attack. It would've been better for them to use greater numbers in bombardment, or possibly ... they don't have the 'numbers' on this ship!?)

When Tolman realized this Carla and the wyvern cavalry had already swarmed the [Alberto]. Tolman cursed his own carelessness and struck his knee with the pommel of his sword.

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Meanwhile, what greeted Carla when she stormed the [Alberto] was the sight of an empty bridge.

“Reporting! We are currently conducting a search within the battleship [Alberto], but we haven't seen a single soul, let alone the false king Soma”

“Impossible! Then what have we been fighting until just now!”

A ship without crew. The bombardment happening just moments before and the undiscovered bombardiers. This was almost like the ghost ships the stories speak of. Did the false king Soma use some forbidden magic. Chills ran down the spines of the Air Force soldiers. Then, a new report came in.

“Reporting! We discovered part of a suit of armor in the wreckage of the main cannons and the machine ballistae!”

“Armor? A corpse?”

“That is ... we found the hand of a mannequin doll in the armor gauntlet we found”

“Mannequin doll?”

“It was likely that kind of trick”

The answer came from the anguished looking Tolman who just entered the bridge. Tolman came upon Carla and advised.

"Milady, let us hurry back to the castle"

"Wait, we still haven't found Soma yet!"

"In all likelihood, Soma ... no, nobody was on this ship. I don't know what manner of magic it was but he probably attacked us through the dolls we found. We have been lured to an empty battleship [Alberto]"

"Lured ...!? No, then their target is...!"

Seeing Carla noticing this, Tolman nodded gravely.

"Probably, Duke Vargas who we left in the Crimson Dragon Castle"

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~A few minutes prior, Soma's POV ~

The biggest problem when hostilities with Castor Vargas was decided was the fact that I had no soldiers to send to the Crimson Dragon Castle Village. I had to send all the Royal Knights and Royal Guard to Carmine Duchy and had ordered the Navy on another errand. With this lack of manpower, the course Hakuya and I chose was to pile up plan upon plan to separate Castor from his subordinates and with just twenty select individuals, secure Castor's person.

First I showed Castor's attitude during the Final Counsel to the citizens and raised a protest movement⁶, sealing Castor's movements. We then blended in with the protesters, infiltrated the Crimson Dragon Castle Village, and hid. We then arranged it so that we could enter the Crimson Dragon Castle anytime through the emergency escape routes like the ones we had in the capital Parnam. At the same time, we carried the battleship [Alberto] with a rhinosaurus under the cover of night and hid her in the forest near the Crimson Dragon Castle Village.

⁶ Other than the spontaneous protests, there was also Hakuya's man who infiltrated and fanned the flames on the people

Then today, while the Air Force were all still stationed within the

Duchy, I declared war against Castor Vargas using the Royal Broadcast equipment we brought along ‘from within the Crimson Dragon Castle Village’. Just like a stage magician waving his right hand to hide the trick being done by his left. With this, Castor would likely be thinking that I was inside the [Alberto]. While he was thinking that, we were already lurking inside the Crimson Dragon Castle Village. Practicing the Art of War’s number 21 of the 36 stratagems [Slough off the Cicada’s Golden Shell] (draw the enemy’s attention while our forces do something else).

The bombardiers inside the Alberto were armored dolls I moved using my [Living Poltergeist]. I played with the Air Force using the main cannons and the machine ballistae I appropriated from Parnam’s castle walls⁷. That way, while the wyvern cavalry were lured to the empty [Alberto], I used the gap to infiltrate the castle, and now I am able to catch Castor’s person.

⁷ I can’t move enough dolls to also handle the secondary armaments though

The problem now was whether or not Castor himself would lead the wyvern cavalry. Even if we could launch a surprise attack on the Crimson Dragon Castle it would have been meaningless if the all-important general wasn’t there. He seems to prefer that kind of fighting to begin with so I was worried, but Hakuya confidently said that it would be alright. According to him:

[Duke Vargas is lacking in forethought, but he is well aware of that fact. He had come to danger several times during his nearly a hundred years of military campaigning. Which is why we would use the fact that he is aware that he is not good against an opponent that always attacks from the rear like Your Highness. In all likelihood, he should hesitate to come out thinking Your Highness might have something else in store. Even if Duke Vargas wants to come out, the steward Tolman or someone else with judgement would reproach]

To even consider the opponent’s mentality when forming a strategy, he is a fearsome man, just like Zhuge Liang in the Annals of the Three Kingdoms. When I told Hakuya my impressions, he replied:

[I would like to not hear it coming from Your Highness who even came up with a plan to use a battleship on land. I only measure a person's subtleties carefully, Your Highness is the one crushing them from the outside]

Well, that was roughly how Hakuya and I each used our respective expertises to cook up this plan. As a result, the plan worked splendidly, and we the infiltrator team could enter the Crimson Dragon Castle Village. There were a meager amount of defenders in the castle, but they were all swept clean by the number 1 in strength, Aisha.

And then that's how we come to this 'face to face meeting'.

"I'm relieved we could meet each other like this, Castor Vargas"

"You ... Soma Kazuya!"

Currently, I was facing the Air Force Marshal Castor Vargas in the Crimson Dragon Castle banquet hall. He looked younger than what his projection showed. Is that your impressions on seeing a two meter tall man with dragon tail and wings? I smiled wryly to myself.

"Your Highness, please stand back!"

Aisha and the infiltrator team elites stepped up to defend me. The [Musashiboy-kun doll (large)] among those elites looked surreal. ... it was a weird choice if I could say so myself.

Seeing me defended by the soldiers, Castor barked.

"Oi Soma Kazuya! You're a hero aren't you!? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, hiding behind a woman!? Fight with me man to man!"

"Don't be ridiculous. All I've been doing since being summoned was deskwork, you know"

Being challenged to personal combat, I could only shrug my shoulders. Having a boss fight right away even though I never had a chance to raise my level⁸ was out of the question, right. Even though I was part of this infiltration team, I didn't even defeat a single guard. Well, I was useless here, but in another way, I'm right now in the middle of a fight of my

own.

⁸ I have no idea whether the concept exists here, though

I was in the middle of a battle, working my split consciousness in full, manipulating the armored dolls I left in the battleship Alberto to operate the main cannons and anti-air machine ballistae I surreptitiously loaded, luring the wyvern cavalry away. However, it seems the wyvern cavalry was more skilled than I imagined. They were taken by surprise but even the machine ballistae that are known as wyvern-killers did not take out many of them. I probably wouldn't last much longer.

"... well, whatever. I don't have much time so I'll arrest you right here"

"Hmph, just you try! Don't think you can catch me with just this few people!"

Castor loudly spread the wings on his back to intimidate me. The wind pressure from that alone threw several of the infiltrating soldiers to the back wall. ... are you kidding me!? Is this a dragonewt's power? Having the blood of humans and dragons isn't just for show, I see.

The next moment, Castor kicked the ground and after staying in the air a short while, he lunged. He didn't even give anyone else a glance, his unsheathed sword was pointed straight at me.

"Your Highness!"

Aisha stood in front of me spreading her hands to cover me. She stopped Castor's attack with her greatsword. A loud *ching* rang out as metal collided with metal.

"Damnations! Out of the way, dark elf girl!"

"I refuse! I'm not letting you lay a finger on His Highness!"

Aisha swung her greatsword with all her strength, sending Castor flying.

Castor nimbly landed and cursed.

"Damnations, what ridiculous strength!"

“Yes. I’m not good with my head. But we have Hakuya, Juna, and Duchess Walter, all people with good heads. Yet when I’m told that my strength will be needed for His Highness’ supremacy, when I’m told I can stay by his side, I’m fine with ‘ridiculous strength’!”

Aisha readied her greatsword again, gradually shortening her distance to Castor.

“Why! Why are you so loyal to this man who hides behind women!”

“If you’re asking my opinion, then it’s because my King’s country’s cooking is delicious⁹, and because he saved my village ... and a lot more, but after all, the most important one is because I like him as a person! I want to always be right by King Soma and Princess Liecia!”

⁹ «TN: priorities ...»

Ah ... this is embarrassing. I know it’s not that kind of scene, but I can’t help being happy when a pretty dark elf said something like that to me. In contrast to my broadly smiling face, Castor had a loathsome look on his.

“... Then die in his defense”

As he said that Castor slashed at Aisha once again, but that moment.

[I won’t let you!]

“!?”

The [Musashiboy-kun (large)] that had snuck behind Castor unawares slashed at castor with his halberd. Castor turned back and stopped the attack with his sword, but the moment he was going to counterattack, Musashiboy-kun rolled aside. Then as if tearing through his back, Liecia jumped out from inside holding her rapier.

“What!? Princess Liecia!?”

Against Liecia’s counterattack, Castor reflexively withdrew his sword. To Castor, Liecia was the daughter of the Lord he swore his allegiance to. Normally she wouldn’t be someone he would raise his sword against. If we had confronted Castor from the start with Liecia in clear view, he

would have used his strength to disarm her without wounding her. To not let that happen, and having anticipated this sort of thing, I had Liecia hide inside [Musashiboy-kun (large)] and wait for her chance. That hesitation proved fatal to Castor.

“[Ice Sword Mountain]!”

“Kuh!”

Not letting the gap go, Liecia produced spikes of ice from the floor and ceiling, restraining Castor.

“Aisha!”

“Got it Princess!”

Turning towards the now immobile Castor, Aisha struck him with a full swing of the flat of her greatsword. The sound of ice breaking followed a moment later by the sound of Castor crashing onto the wall resounded. I witnessed the scene of a person being thrown against the wall making a circular-shaped dent like in a fighting anime. Having received an attack that would unmistakably kill me in an instant if it were me on the receiving end, Castor still kept his consciousness even while being wounded all over. As expected from a dragonewt, I suppose. The wounded Castor groaned.

“Kuh ... why, Princess ... I, only wanted to ... return the crown, to Lord Alberto ...”

“Has father ever even asked for that?”

Liecia bluntly said as she looked at Castor with cold eyes.

“That’s ...”

“No, what father wanted has nothing to do with it. I want Soma to be King out of my own will. If father wanted to have his crown back I will fight him by Soma’s side”

“Why do ... you go so far ...”

“Because I want to see it. The ‘new shape’ of this country that Soma will make”

While saying that Liecia attached something black on Castor's neck.

"You should know this already, but this is a [Slavery Collar] for slaves. This item contains magic that can make it constrict by the master's will, and upon harm being done to the master it will cut the head away. If this collar were to be taken off without the master's consent, it will likewise cut the head away. Finally, this collar's master is set to Soma Kazuya"

"....."

With the collar on, Castor hung his head. Castor was now unable to go against me anymore, the moment the Air Force was defeated by the Royal Guard. At that moment, a young girl burst into the room.

"Father!"

The girl with fiery red hair and glimmering golden pupils and dragon wings rushed to the slumping Castor. Ecksel once said "one of my granddaughters stayed at Castor's side ..." with a sorrowful face. Which means that this girl must be Castor's daughter Carla. Just a while ago I felt the battleship [Alberto] being disarmed. Seeing her metallic red armor, she might have been fighting the [Alberto] up until now.

The moment Carla saw my face, she drew her sword.

"You. How dare you"

"Stop it Carla!"

Liecia pinioned Carla from behind as she was about to attack me.

"Liecia!? Let go! He ...!"

"Duke Vargas has already been attached with a [Slavery Collar]! If you kill Soma, Duke Vargas will also die!"

"Wha ..."

Strength left Carla's body and her sword dropped from her hand. She fell to the floor once Liecia released her. Tears streamed down her face as she looked in stupor. It hurt my chest a little, but she was one of the supporters of this rebellion. I can't give her preferential treatment. I asked Aisha to also attach a [Slavery Collar] on her.

As she does the wyvern cavalrymen who were attacking the battleship [Alberto] gathered within the hall. They were all seething with anger but upon seeing the [Slavery Collar] on Castor and Carla's necks they understood there was nothing they could do and grit their teeth. The heavy air felt unpleasant but I can't flinch here.

"Is the Vargas house steward Tolman here?"

"..... over here"

I called out and a man with white streaks in his hair that looked more fitting in a suit rather than armor stepped forward. So this is Tolman.

"You remember the rule we set at the Final Counsel, don't you? [If an opponent is defeated or captured, then the army under him will immediately placed under the winner]"

"Yes ..."

"As you can see, the Air Force Marshall Castor Vargas has been arrested. I am authorizing you to be the temporary Air Marshal as of now. Organize the Air Force and fall under the Royal Guard!"

"... May I ask you something?"

Tolman said as if swallowing a bitter pill.

"... what is it?"

"What will happen to Duke Vargas and Lady Carla?"

"The sentence for these two will be decided after the war. It does not merit mentioning now"

"....."

"Rather than your Lord, worry about yourselves. The entire Air Force is now a rebel army you know"

I said as I looked around at the lined up Air Force soldiers and officers.

"If you fall under the Royal Guard now you will be considered only following Castor's orders. Those who don't will be considered a rebel and given the same judgement as Castor"

“You want us to sell our lord!”

“That’s right! We won’t abandon Lord Castor!”

I glared at the dissenting voices.

“Think about it carefully. Guilt by association is a thing in this country. If you became traitors of the state, not only yourselves but your kin will receive the same judgement. You should speak only if you have the resolve!”

“” “”

The room became silent. Though the Air Force have no fear for their own lives, that’s because the only lives they’re wagering was their own. They’re not so stubborn as to cause trouble for their families.

In the heavy atmosphere, the first to kneel was Tolman.

“..... I shall abide by your words, Your Highness”

“S, Sir Tolman!”

“We can still ...”

“Silence! Don’t you know that you’re only making it worse for Duke Vargas by resisting!”

“Guh ...”

With a single roar the dissenters were silenced. Tolman bowed once again.

“Your orders if you may, Your Highness. What shall we the Air Force do henceforth?”

I gave orders to the splendidly bowing Tolman.

First, you shall declare that battle in the Vargas Duchy is over. Announce that Duke Vargas has been arrested and the Air Force is now under the command of the Royal Guard. Afterwards, you shall gather all the Air Force members that are not currently here. Once they are all here I will have you head for the Carmine Duchy. Additionally, you shall also announce that anyone who still continues to rebel after this will be

judged as a traitor. Is that clear?"

"Yessir! It will be done"

Thus the 'needless fighting' in the Vargas Duchy, both to the losing and the winning sides, ended. Now ... I can finally head for the Carmine Duchy.

"Just you wait, Georg Carmine"

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«Elfrieden Classical Idioms Course»

[Attacking a castle with a battleship, (Like –)] ... figurative expression. An act, or a person who does something, no one else thought of. The expression came to be when during the Five-Day War King Soma attacked the treasonous Castor's castle, he gained victory through a plan involving a battleship. Close synonyms on Earth are [Copernican Revolution (Idea)], [Columbus' Egg].

Chapter 8: Sacrifice the Plum Tree to Preserve the Peach Tree

~ Crimson Dragon Castle Town • Morning - Second Day ~

It was the next dawn after the battle where wyverns flew past each other and the tumultuous barrage of fire from the concealed battleship. I, Liecia and Castor's daughter Carla, were eating our breakfast at the government office room in Crimson Dragon Castle. Carla was in an ill mood, but Aisha, who held a great sword behind her, had warned, 「If you do any suspicious movements, I will certainly cut you down」, so she was behaving herself. By the way, Aisha was still in her 「Stalker Bodyguard」 behavior. Since we had successfully captured Crimson Dragon Castle, perhaps she can assume the newly established title of Royal Guard for the long term. Well, these were talks for the post-war period though.

After capturing Castor Valgas, we seized the control of the Air Force, and so we waited until the entire Air Force gathered at Crimson Dragon Castle Town. Currently, we were summoning those who hadn't arrived and organizing those who had, so Hakuya and Tolman were very busy. Castor and parts of Castor's top Air Force echelon had been deported to the Capital. So they wouldn't become a hindrance, they were controlled with a 『Slave Collar』 (It's an item that decapitates the wearer if they do something 'unwise' even for a bit; an item that exists in a world with many races and magic), this was done so that there wouldn't be anyone trying to rescue them along the way.

By the way, I left behind Castor's daughter, Carla close to my side. This was because she served as a hostage that could be seen by the Air Force directly, so I can nip the buds of insurrections before they bloom. Not only did she wear a 『Slave Collar』 but Aisha also kept watch over her, so she couldn't make any heedless moves. Perhaps there are reasons why her unruly behaviors she showed yesterday had gone away, and today, Carla was silent as if she was pretending to be mute. As if to be the substitute for Carla, it was Liecia who was talkative. The contents of her words

were,

「I think Carla can be seen as a wonderful devoted person. Since she is persistent in her faithfulness, no matter how much she hated it, she would do anything that was requested of her. In my opinion, she is a good girl.」(Liecia)

「.....」(Carla)

Liecia was trying to promote Carla. She had been talking about Carla's charm as a women constantly until now. Inside the government office room, that had belonged to the enemy until yesterday, while we were eating the bento I brought from Parnam (it was prepared, so we wouldn't be poisoned since the place belonged to the enemy until yesterday), my fiancée, the First Queen Consort, somehow or another, was recommending the enemy supreme commander's daughter, who had been forced to wear a slave collar, to me as a Royal Consort. This was a rather chaotic scene.

By the way, the difference between Queen Consort and Royal Consort in this country was that only the children of the Queen Consort could inherit the crown, and not the children from the Royal Consort. Also, it was possible to have several Queen Consorts and Royal Consorts (they would be titled as the First Queen Consort, the First Royal Consort, the Second Queen Consort, and so on), but to become a Queen Consort, the woman needs to hold a social position above the title of Noble Knight[1]. On the other hand, a woman may become a Royal Consort no matter what her social position is. If the King didn't care about how he appeared in front of others, even a slave could become a Royal Consort.

「I-in addition, Carla is amazing if she takes her clothes off. It might be hard to see with armor on the top, but she has bigger breasts and buttocks and a tighter waist th-.....than me. Since a dragonnewt has a long lifespan, she would always look young.」(Liecia)

「W-what are you talking about, Liecia!？」(Carla)

As expected, when her body proportions were being mentioned, Carla couldn't help but to break out from her silent stand. However, Liecia

rebuked Carla hard.

「Quiet, Carla! Hey, Souma, Carla is really an amorous woman.....」
(Liecia)

「.....Liecia.」(Souma)

「If this suits you, then you can try to have one go with her,...」(Liecia)

「Liecia-！」(Souma)

While strengthening my tone a bit, Liecia's speech stopped. Seeing her frightened expression..... Made my chest feel painful. While letting out a sigh, I scratched my head briskly.

「Liecia, I understand how you feel. But have you properly thought about the risk for me as the King if I do that?」(Souma)

「.....」(Liecia)

There is no Queen Consort who would welcome and talk positively about a Royal Consort. Even so, even if she was the candidate for First Queen Consort, Liecia was recommending me to marry Carla as a Royal Consort. It was because Liecia wholeheartedly wants to save Carla. As a rebel army, every member of the Air Force the officers to the lowly soldiers, was under suspicion of treason. Of course, it was also not possible to punish everyone, as they will be incorporated under the Royal Army command's.「Air Force Marshall Castor, including parts of his top echelon would be implicated」, so Castor will carry their share of the responsibility.

Thus, Castor's daughter, Carla, who supported the rebellion through her own volition, after the war finishes, she certainly will be put on trial, together with Castor. As it is, she couldn't evade the capital punishment. That's why Liecia was trying to force Carla to become a concubine for me. The king has strong authority in this country. Although at the public stance, the Law was supreme and independent, but it wasn't impossible for the King to use the power of the state to declare a criminal to be "unable to be judged by the law".

If Carla pleased me, then I might exert my influence so she would be

exempted from trial. However, that is... even if it's possible, it's better not to try it.

「If the King didn't observe the Law, then the Citizens who were protected by the Law, wouldn't respect the King. If we acted illogically, then we would be punished. You know about this, right Liecia?」(Souma)

「But that,..... Even so.....」(Liecia)

Of course, Liecia had already known about this. Even so, she couldn't give up for the sake of her friend. Really..... A "King" is really an unpleasant job.

「Liecia, begging for my life is unnecessary.」(Carla)

Carla said bluntly to Liecia who was still trying to say something.

「I am just a humble soldier. I won't hold my life dearly after being defeated in the war. If I was allowed to live and became a plaything for the enemy, then I will bite off my tongue.」(Carla)

Carla resolutely threw away Liecia's mediation effort. Ah..... I feel I somehow know why the both of them are good friends. Carla's earnest absolutely unyielding obstinacy after she decided something is similar with Liecia's. That's why, I can't help but to sigh.

「I wish you can use that resolution on something that won't make Liecia sad, you know?」(Souma)

「Don't tell someone else what to do! In the first place, you bastard..... ugh...」(Carla)

「Carla!?」(Liecia)

Carla moaned in pain in the middle of her speech. It seems that the『Slave Collar』constricted her neck. I see, that item also won't permit abusive language towards the master. Quite harsh, I think. After 10 seconds, finally Carla was released from the pain and then she glared at me. No, just now, it was she who did the stupid thing, right?

At that time, Hakuya and Tolman entered the office. Tolman stood before me, saluted me in a military manner briskly, and then gave a

report.

「Your Highness Souma. The Air Force's mobilization has been completed.」(Tolman)

「Alright. Then..... Shall we go?」(Souma)

I stood up and gave out orders.

「Hakuya, I left the cleaning up of this place to you. Then, using the Broadcast Orb located here, contact Excel who confronted Amidonia at Altomura. Tell her that it will be sufficient if she can buy time until today's evening.」(Souma)

「As you wish.」(Hakuya)

「Tolman will lead the Air Force Wings to do continuous aerial bombing of Randell at the Carmine Duchy. However, the aerial bombing targets are only anti-air ballista located at the walls and Randell Central Castle. No matter what happens, don't drop a single gunpowder barrel on the citizens' houses. If there are any citizens who become casualties, then there will be punishment after the war is finished. Do you understand?!」(Souma)

「Yes, Your Majesty. I acknowledge the orders!」(Tolman)

「Liecia and Aisha will accompany me to meet with Ludwin's unit.」(Souma)

「I understand.」(Liecia)

「Roger, Your Majesty.」(Aisha)

Alright. After everyone received their order, I turned my eyes towards Carla.

「Carla, you will also go with us.」(Souma)

「Humph, just throw me into jail and be done with it.」(Carla)

「No-no, since you have come this far, why don't you join us to personally see who is manipulating us.」(Souma)

「? What do you mean? Nobody manipulated us.....」(Carla)

「No, we are being manipulated.」(Souma)

「What?」(Carla)

I shrugged my shoulders at Carla who was puzzled.

「It doesn't mean that I know all the details. Even so, why don't I show that I am playing my part until the end? I wonder who wrote the synopsis of this battle.[2]」(Souma)

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~Randell, Carmine Duchy • Noon - Second Day~

The walls of the city in the middle of the Carmine Duchy, Randell, were washed in a relaxed mood. Although the Kingdom's Army and the Royal Army were battling even until now, the battle was completely happening at the fortress that the Royal Army constructed before Randell's very eyes, so there was not even a single arrow that flew towards the walls that enclosed Randell.

「So boring.....」(Soldier A)

A soldier who was ordered to defend the wall complained. Finding fault with that complaint, his fellow soldier frowned.

「Hey, hey, we are currently in the middle of battle with the Royal Army you know?」(Soldier B)

「Even if you say so..... The battle was only around that fort, right? Then, is there any meaning of guarding this place?」(Soldier A)

Then his other friends started laughing 「Hahahaha」.

「Isn't this good, having it so boring like this? Did you really want to fight against the Royal Army at the front lines?」(Soldier B)

「I-I'm never saying that I wanted to.」(Soldier A)

「The people at the front might have wanted to have our duty instead. At the moment we rose up against the Royal Army, we were labeled as rebels and a rebel army. Furthermore, I heard that the breakaway Glaive Magna-dono also joined the Royal Army. How sad to battle with someone

who had eaten out from the same pot.] (Soldier B)

「You're so right there. There also talks about Amidonia moving. What are the King and Duke Carmine are thinking?」 (Soldier C)

Now there was another soldier who complained.

「If you think like that, then guarding the walls is the best of the best, right?」 (Soldier B)

「.....Maybe that's true.」 (Soldier A)

Just as the last soldier said his agreement.

「Hey, look at the eastern sky! Something is coming!」 (Soldier D)

Someone yelled, so everyone began to look at the eastern sky. If they strained their eyes, they could see shadows like a swarm of mosquitoes in the clear sky. The numbers were too large for a flock of birds as the number was no less than a thousand. When that flock drew closer, it could be recognized that it was the Wyvern Knights of the Air Force. A feeling of relief circulated among the Army's soldiers.

「.....Thank heavens. Duke Castor Valgas is an ally.」 (Soldier A)

「The reinforcements from the Air Force arrived!」 (Soldier B)

「With this, that battle will soon conclude. That fortress would be easily bombarded by the Air Force.」 (Soldier C)

Everyone nodded with an expression that showed they agreed.

Yes, certainly the end of that battle was near. However, that ending was something that was unexpected by the soldiers. The Air Force, that "passed past" the fortress, that was constructed by Royal Army in front of Randell and where they had secluded themselves, began to drop barrels packed with gunpowder on the anti-air ballista installed at Randell's walls.



Tolman, who led the Wyvern Knights corps, hovered above the sky of Randell, stared at the explosions that resounded below him, the flame

flying around, and the black smoke pillared that up to the sky. Over half of the bombardment target, the anti-air ballista installed atop the walls, had disappeared without a trace.

The gunpowder barrel, used by the Air Force, was a weapon with a structure similar to pottery balls that were used by pirates in the Sengoku period to sink enemy ships (to make it easier to imagine, a fireworks ball) [3]. The explosion time was adjusted by the length of a long wick that had been soaked in oil, and after being ignited, it would be dropped and explode after the prescribed time passed. It wasn't something like an incendiary bomb that exploded upon touching the ground, but if the Air Force had calculated the altitude when dropping it, then it was possible to achieve a similar effect. (Furthermore, even if it fails, the gunpowder that spread out when it crashed on the ground could be burned if sparks hit it, and the range of damage would be extensive).

(Just how many Army soldiers died in the aerial bombing just now.....)
(Tolman)

Tolman bit his lips at the present state where he had no choice but to blow away the people that had been allies until yesterday.

「Don't ask for forgiveness. This is also for the Lord and Princess's sake.」(Tolman)

Tolman then gave out an order to the Wyvern Knights Corps to rouse their mood.

「The anti-air ballista has been silenced! Hereafter, we will bombard the Randell Central Castle! Never, ever drop the barrels on the residential districts! The pride of our Air Force is at stake, so don't cause any unnecessary casualties!」(Tolman)

「「「Ooooooooooh!」」」(Wyvern Knights)

The Air Force men raised their voices at the encouragement that contained Tolman's grief. And thus, the Wyvern Knights' formations began moving to bombard Georg Carmine's Castle that was located in the middle of Randall.



~ The same day • Souma's side ~

It was during the time when the Wyvern Knights were doing their bombing run.

The Royal Army's flying dragon gondola, that Liecia, Aisha and I, plus Carla the prisoner of war, had boarded, arrived at the fortress where Ludwin's unit was confined. Actually, landing at the fortress that was under siege was dangerous, however, when the Air Force began to bomb Randell, the enemy retreated in surprise. Because of this, we could safely enter the fortress.

Ludwin, Hulbert and Kaede-chan met with us. I am relieved that although the three of them looked a bit tired, no one was hurt. Since they had held the fortress for one and half days, unexpected things might have occurred. Then, I bumped my fist with Hulbert.[4]

「As promised, I have brought along the Air Force.」(Souma)

「As promised, I have staved out the Army's attack.」(Hulbert)

We boasted our achievements to each other.

「It's only one and half a day right? I would be troubled if you can't even do that much?」(Souma)

「Stupid. The enemy even brought out cannons, you know? If the dark elves didn't come as reinforcements, then there would have been considerable damage done.」(Hulbert)

「Is that so..... Then I will reward them heavily after this war ends. Anyway, it's good that everyone is safe.」(Souma)

「The King too, since you are weak, don't push yourself.」(Hulbert)

「Hahaha.」(Souma)

「Hahaha.」(Hulbert)

Hulbert and I performed a bold laugh together. The female camp was looking with amazed expressions at us.

「What are they doing? Both of them, really...」(Liecia)

「Maybe it's what they call camaraderie between men?」(Aisha)

「Hal was just burned by competitive spirit with His Majesty. He only want to boasts up to him.」(Kaede)

「.....」(Carla)

The female group just said whatever they liked, but only Carla didn't have any expression. Then with this atmosphere, Ludwin kneeled down in front of me and reported.

「Your Majesty, I have carried out the duty to protect the fortress.」
(Ludwin)

「You have done well. Everyone's dedication will certainly be rewarded when the war is over.」(Souma)

He reported with formal words, so I also replied with formal words. Then Hulbert and the others were grinning at the sight of me who had suddenly put air of dignity, but ignore, ignore. Anyway, time is precious.

「Ludwin, gather the soldiers and quickly make preparations to march.」
(Souma)

「Yes, Your Majesty! Then, are we to assault Randell?」(Ludwin)

「No..... The battle in this place is already finished.」(Souma)

「? What, that me-.....」(Ludwin)

「Reporting!」(Soldier)

The next moment, a Royal Army soldier came running. The suddenness made Aisha and Ludwin drew their sword, but the soldier fell down prostrating and then raised his face.

「Randell Castle has flown the white flag! O-Our Army has become victorious!」(Soldier)

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A little while before that, Georg Carmine's Castle 『Randell Castle』, was in a great uproar as they suddenly received the Air Force's surprise

attack. Did Duke Castor Valgas betray them? Did the King and Duke Valgas have a behind the scenes deal? Is this the scheme from that Femme Fatale Duchess Excel Walter? They had conjured various guesses, but nobody had guessed correctly that Souma's clever scheme had defeated the Air Force on the first day.

The people who were especially panicked inside Randell were the worn-out private armies who had been exhausted from attacking the fortress yesterday, and the dishonest nobles who took refuge in Randell, who had been removed from the frontlines until today. No sooner had they noticed that Randell's Castle was trembling from the Air Force's bombing, regardless of the current situation, did they stampede towards the office of Georg Carmine.

「Duke Carmine!? Why are you this easy going at this time!」(Noble)

「The Air Force has betrayed us! Quickly do some countermeasures!」(Noble)

「Your command please! What should we do!?」(Noble)

The nobles shouted out what can be described as practically abusive language at Georg and made the wolf-faced beastman Beowulf, who came to report about the bombing just now, crumple his eyebrows in anger. He wanted to draw the sword from his waist to cut the disrespectful people, but...

「Beowulf.」(Georg)

「.....Yes.」(Beowulf)

Hearing his name being called by Georg, Beowulf corrected his sitting posture. Georg then asked with a calm tone.

「Give me that situation report about the damage from the aerial bombing just now?」(Georg)

「Yes. For the bombing at the castle, the roof and parts of the tower has been mostly blown off, luckily the number of casualties are minimal..... However, the anti-air ballistas installed at the walls have been completely lost during the surprise attack. I was told that the casualties amongst the

soldiers that were guarding the walls was not few.] (Beowulf)

「I see.....」(Georg)

Georg's countenance didn't change after receiving Beowulf's report, while the nobles who heard it became white as a sheet. The loss of anti-air ballista means that they have lost any means of opposing the Wyvern Knights. So currently, the Army didn't have any means to stop Wyvern Knights' bombing. In other words, even if they took refuge in the castle, they would be one-sidedly killed in the bombing.

Georg brushed his beard that joined with the mane.

「In other words, the people inside the castle, like us, have become hostages.」(Georg)

「Yes. That is true.」(Beowulf)

Hearing Beowulf's response, Georg began to spoke while raising the corner of his mouth.

「Then in this war, we have lost.」(Georg)

Georg lightly made a remark about accepting the defeat, so for a few moments, the dishonest nobles didn't know what to say. Lost. When they realized what this meant, their face were dyed in red and blue, while pressing unto Georg.

「What are you saying, Duke Carmine! We still haven't lost yet!」(Noble)

「That's right! The army was mostly uninjured! We can recover as much as we like!」(Noble)

「If there is no other way to counter the Air Force, then we can withdraw to another city! Then we will plan our retaliation and assault the King and the Royal Army!」(Noble)

「..... So you say, to desert Randell?」(Georg)

Georg was astonished by the nobles who advocated to resist until the bitter end.

「What kind of Lord casts away the Citizens? If the Lord runs away and

abandons the Citizens, he wouldn't be welcomed by the Citizens of the other cities.] (Georg)

「What are you talking about!? The Citizens will abide by the winner! Even if we incur their displeasure for a while, we can make them yield as we like!」(Noble)

「That's right! Even if it's only a lip service, we can survive! First we survive, then we can think about this later!」(Noble)

Hearing the nobles who were thinking about nothing except for their own safety, Georg let out a sigh.

「.....In the end, you critters are really cute. Now that I think about it, you are people of that kind of sort, after all. Really..... Even though we only haven't had any battles with foreign enemies for just awhile, it had brought forth this many rotten roots. As expected, so that the young bud can sprout, the rotten tree must be eradicated.」(Georg)

「Duke Carmine? What are you talking.....」(Noble)

Disregarding the nobles that became confused by the sudden change of his ambiance, Georg looked at Beowulf.

「Beowulf, do as we planned.」(Georg)

「!As your wish...」(Beowulf)

Beowulf raised his right hand and suddenly soldiers with drawn swords stormed into the room and surrounded the nobles. With twenty, no, thirty swords pointed at their faces, the nobles, who didn't dare to make any movements, finally understood what Georg had planned. The soldiers stripped them off their weapons and made them wore 『Slave Collar』s.

「This is, what this means Duke Carmine!」(Noble)

「It can't be! Duke Carmine! You planned to offer our neck to King Souma and beg for your life!？」(Noble)

「I-Injustice!」(Noble)

「You bastard! You are filth, Georg Carmine!」(Noble)

Even at this kind of situation, the nobles were still speaking these words that made Georg let out a sigh of disappointment once more.

「It's disappointing that I have to join forces with you..... Take them away.」(Georg)

The soldiers took the restrained nobles out from the room. As there were those who were still resisting, the『Slave Collar』s that they were forced to wear had the master set to Beowulf, so the collars wuldn not constrict their necks and rob them from their consciousness. Even when they couldn't be seen anymore, their abusive curses at Georg could still be heard from the corridor. After they couldn't be heard anymore, finally Georg felt that a great burden had been released from his shoulder.

He took a breath, and asked Beowulf.

「What about the private armies and the Zem mercenaries?」(Georg)

「Yes. They should have been restrained by our troops by now.」
(Beowulf)

Hearing Beowulf's reply, Georg nodded in satisfaction. Then he casted off the grim expression he had until now and made a gentle smile.

「I have succeeded. With this, I will regret nothing.」(Georg)

「.....」(Beowulf)

In contrast with Georg who was cheerful, Beowulf had an anguished expression. He might been depressed by what he had to do after this. Georg also seemed to understand how Beowulf felt, so he gave his order as gently as possible.

「Then, Beowulf. I entrust my part to you.」(Georg)

「.....Yes!」(Beowulf)

He showed a bit of hesitation, but Beowulf placed the『Slave Collar』on Georg. Despite wearing the collar that forced absolute obedience to the master under the threat of death, Georg had such a peaceful expression, that it was as if he was wearing a luxurious bowtie fixed on by his wife to go to a wedding reception. After the『Slave Collar』was finished being

placed on his neck, Georg gave his last order as the Army's Supreme Commander.

「Send a messenger to capitulate to the Royal Army and put yourself under His Majesty's command. Excluding the private army of the dishonest nobles, the men only abide to my command. I will bear all their punishment. Afterwards..... I entrust the rest to Glaive. Execute it!」
(Georg)

「.....Yes! At once.」(Beowulf)

After saluting, Beowulf exited from the room. Georg saw him off, and then took out something from the bottom drawer of his desk. Inside was a wine that was bottled in the same year that Liecia was born. It was something given by Albert, when Liecia was born, to Georg with a wish, 『Please protect my daughter always』. After Princess Liecia graduated from the Military Academy and was placed at a position close to him, several times he mentioned that 『I intend to drink myself to death with this wine on the Princess' wedding day』.

(Wedding..... Huh? I only regret that I can't see the princess becoming a bride, but when I think that I can send a wedding congratulatory gift greater than anyone else, it doesn't feel that bad. This wine..... I will ask someone to send it to the Young King. The former enemy that has snatched away the princess, maybe I detest him just a little bit.)

While having a self-deriding laugh, he imagined himself standing in line at the wedding day between Souma and Liecia.

(Will that King enter this castle? I want to meet him personally and talk with him for once.)

Georg might have wished this, but then someone delivered a message that, 「The King won't enter Randell, he already led the Royal Army towards the 'west'」. Furthermore there was an additional order, 「As soon as the Army is finished being reorganized under Glaive and Beowulf, immediately follow the Royal Army」. Hearing this report, in Georg's mind a speech appeared:

『Then I will step over that old tree.』

He remembered Souma's face when he said this during that time.

「Gahaha! I see, I see, so that's how it is! So the King is aiming at the king of large fish!」(Georg)

At the moment when Georg comprehended everything, he laughed in a loud voice.

「That's right! I am only a stepping stone! Splendid, Young King! It's the new generation's turn! My time is already over! Now, King, Princess! Step over this old tree and go forward hand in hand! Let the youths open their buds and bring glory to Elfrieden!」

He had reached the end of his time, but Georg felt truly blessed from the bottom of his heart.

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In case you are wondering what gift Georg had send to Souma and Liecia, Georg gave Souma a stable foundation where the rotten root had been mostly cut off and young buds can sprout. Souma do some improv though.

* * *

[1] That is a Knight who held Nobility Rank, just like Chevalier or Ritter rank. Not just some random soldier calling himself a Knight...

[2] Souma is using sarcastic-rhetoric tone here. He had already know, but he pretend to not know about it.

[3] The inside is like this:



[4] Like a bro should do. *You fujoshi might squeal here* (E/N: Not enough bromance yet for that imo.) The Fujoshi that I know could made slash-fic even between character that only meet only once in the story... Maybe I need to stop using her as a barometer for other fujoshi. Oh in case you wondering, she functioning normally in her job life. Maybe only few people know her true nature...

Chapter 9: Declaration of War

Let's examined everything that has happened up until now in order. It began when first, the Three Dukes opposed King Albert's sudden abdication and didn't show any intention to put themselves under my rule. The uncooperative attitude during the desperate time of reorganizing the country, made that confrontation deepen. However, only the Navy Admiral, Excel Walter sent her subordinate Juna-san as a liaison to convey her intentions to submit under my rule, but still acted as though she still belonged to the Three Dukes' side to investigate the movements of Georg Carmine who was strangely obstinate.

Then, when I conducted investigations on the fraud conducted by nobles, to rehabilitate the government's financial affairs, some of them escaped and began gathering under Georg who showed a confrontational attitude towards me. Then, Georg took those dishonest nobles as his own subordinates. Then Hal's father, Glaive Magna who was especially opposed to this, began to bring some of the Army's soldiers and officers to breakaway. Then, Georg rejected my offer at my Final Counsel, and the muscle-brained Castor jumped the bandwagon with him, which caused this war to happen.

..... So, currently, this is the scenario that the citizens, and not to mention the Amidonia Dukedom, know. However, this was thoroughly the superficial side of the scenario, the inner side was completely different. Since it had ended, I can speak of it now. This Three Dukes' War (Excel hopes for the name to be changed) scenario was written by none other than, Georg Carmine.

The plan that I and Hakuya had worked out was a completely different thing, in the first place we never had any plans to battle with Georg Carmine and Castor Valgas. I could somehow grasp Georg Carmine's personality based on Liscia's story about him, and Castor was a muscle-brain, so we thought they would recognize me as the King after freely seeing the merits of the plan that we had polished.

However, when Georg sheltered the dishonest nobles, the plan had go

awry. Because, Hakuya and me never took the nobles seriously. They already driven out from their jobs, and so that they wouldn't be funneled outside the border, their assets were seized. So we thought, it wasn't a big deal no matter where they had gone to. However, Georg put those nobles close to his position, along with their own armies. At first, I felt indignant since it was different from what I heard in Liscia's stories.

At that time, Glaive Magna who had broken away from the Army had an audience with me. More or less, the pretext was to apologize for Hal's disrespectful attitude, but even without that, sooner or later, he would have asked for an audience with me. Glaive had been entrusted with a secret order from Georg. After asking forgiveness for Hal's disrespectful attitude, he began to carry it out.

『Thereupon Your Majesty, please pardon me for performing another impolite action.』(Glaive)

Then, when I asked about it.

『This is... If it is possible, it would be better if the talk couldn't be heard by many people.....』(Glaive)

Glaive asked to clear the room of people. When the number of the people was reduced to Liscia, Aisha, Hakuya, Glaive, Hulbert, Kaede and me, Glaive finally began to speak about Georg's current plan.

『Duke Carmine intends to gather the nobles who had committed fraud and dishonesty in one place, and then after they launch a rebellion, Your Majesty would subjugate him and the nobles together.』

So that the hiding and troubling, dishonest nobles could be caught wholesomely, Georg deliberately showed a clear, confrontational attitude towards me and acted as the light bug trap for the disturbing elements. Then to Glaive, who he especially trusted in the Army, he was ordered to breakaway with the reason of 『distrust over sheltering the dishonest nobles』 so he could save the talented people gathered in the Army, so that they could join with the Royal Army after the war was finished. Then, after the disturbing elements had been gathered, he would reject my Final Counsel and plunge himself into the war..... and then intend to

be arrested together with the nobles.

The 40,000 strong Army was a formidable foe, but if Royal Army, the Air Force and the Navy cooperated, then they can overwhelm it. Actually, the reason why the Air Force only destroyed the anti-air ballista in the battle with the Army, had been arranged so that the Army can have a reason to capitulate. Then, by using the capitulation timing, the nobles and their private armies, including the Zem mercenaries, would be captured by Georg's subordinates in one stroke. This is what Georg had planned. After hearing that plan from Glaive, I unconsciously shouted.

『Don't joke with me![1] Who asked for such thing!』(Souma)

『Although that anger is justified..... Duke Carmine had thought this by himself.』(Glaive)

『Is he stupid?! The dishonest nobles have already lost their jobs, their assets have been seized. Those insects can just be left alone.』(Souma)

『Let me say something for Duke Carmine! That's a naïve way of thinking.』(Glaive)

Glaive became indignant, but nevertheless he quickly suppressed it, since it would be inappropriate for a mere retainer to quarrel with the King. After seeing him like this, my head also calmed down a bit.

『.....What do you mean by naïve?』(Souma)

『Your Majesty, a rotten wheat would also rot the surrounding wheat. There are horizontal relationships that support the nobles. To maintain each other's influence, they married their sons and daughters repeatedly and created relatives. Perhaps, even if the dishonest acts were put into the trial, the other houses would interrupt. Even if they have lost their house, they can look for shelter under their relatives' house. Then at some point of time, their disdain would make them use their status to rebel against the country.』(Glaive)

『.....』(Souma)

I understood what he wanted to say. To put dishonest nobles, that were fully covered with relationship ties, into a trial, then that means to also

put their relatives and accuse them of being criminals. It might induce the other nobles to be afraid that they would also be implicated and then this might cause them to purposely break off the relationship.[2]

『..... Then, is it necessary to do it to that extent?』(Souma)

『Yes. Then, there is another reason. The King had mentioned that their assets had been seized, however, that is only limited to things that are visible. These underhanded people have funds and influence at places that the public doesn't see. Actually, when those nobles arrived at the Carmine Duchy, they employed Zem mercenaries using that shady money. This is proof that they haven't been deprived from their assets.』(Glaive)

When this was pointed out, I hit my forehead with my palm. That's right. When I was checking the account books, there were some points bothering me when I grasped the flow of the funds. I had forgotten that they could have savings that weren't mentioned in the official papers. I looked at Hakuya's direction and he also had the same expression as me. In the first place, nobility was something unrelated to me, while Hakuya had lived a relatively secluded lifestyle up until now, so we couldn't read the malicious ways of the nobles. At this point in time, I actually had a feeling that I still lacked the sufficient numbers of talented people.

『So, Georg was going to crush the nobles who used those shady funds? However, doesn't this mean that the funds are only flowing towards Zem, which dispatched the mercenaries.....! Ah, the mercenaries!』(Souma)

『Yes. When the dishonest nobles are captured, their private armies would also be apprehended.』(Glaive)

This is something that also existed during the Sengoku period in Japan. [3] An arrangement where soldiers and officers could be released after paying a ransom. The ransom is higher for those with high social positions and if the ransom is not paid, then the prisoners of war could be sold as slaves.[4] In most case, for the soldiers with low social standings, the country would pay the total sum of their ransom and they would be released altogether. For the people with higher social positions, the

ransom would be paid by their families. There are a lot of precedents where a family with low solvency[5] then fell into ruins.

That's why Georg planned to collect the shady funds that the nobles used to employ the mercenaries by asking Zem to pay the ransom for the mercenaries that had been turned into prisoners of war. Amongst the mercenaries dispatched by Zem, there wouldn't be people with high social statuses, even so, the ransom that the country must pay would be a considerable amount. Really..... What a well thought plan. Therefore, it irritated me.

『.....I can't crush down a person who can think that far for any reason. Even at the best of times, I am already short of hands, so if he had made that resolve, he should have cooperated with me!』(Souma)

『Please understand, Your Majesty. Duke Carmine has entrusted the future to you.』(Glaive)

Glaive looked directly at me and it made me gasp.

『Why does he trust me that much? Even when I haven't met him?』
(Souma)

『This is not something that I can answer. If in the future Your Majesty meets with Duke Carmine personally, please ask the person himself.』
(Glaive)

『.....』(Souma)

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Several days later, during the Final Counsel, I tried to ask about Georg's unclear motive.

『Why are you rebelling to that extent?』

Hearing my question, Georg answered, 『Pride as an old warrior.』

『My age has already passed 55, this body could only wait to wither, but I earned the most superb opportunity. My wits will decide the fate of Elfrieden. A once in a lifetime chance, to accomplish big things that would be the legacy for posterity is a cherished dream of a warrior.』

That's why he chose to become the scapegoat as a means of destroying the dishonest nobles. I don't know whether these words were the truth. However, I understood his unwavering determination. He is just a person similar to a father for Liscia, but perhaps this is how this man handed over this simple honest girl to me.



Let's return back to the topic at hand. The information that we received from Glaive was tucked away deep inside the hearts of the people who were there at that time. The only people who had heard this story were only Liscia, Hakuya, Aisha, Kaede, Hulbert and I. 6 people. If by some chance it was known by outside parties, Georg's plan could collapse. That's why, I couldn't speak about this to Excel's side, even though we were already in a cooperative partnership (because of this, Excel still had suspicions on Georg).

After receiving this information, the plan that Hakuya and I had designed had to be amended by including Georg's rebellion drama. It had become a plan that was not only supporting Georg's plan, but also using it as a stepping stone to cross over it.

However, there was just one miscalculation. Because the plan was progressed in secret, it caused Castor to distrust me, and so the Air Force ended up at Georg's side. This was an event that was unexpected for me and Georg as well. No matter how muscle-brained Castor was, we thought that Excel and I could persuade him. Who could have guessed, that the more we persuaded him, the more mule-headed his stubbornness became.

Thanks to that, the battle of Crimson Dragon Castle, which wasn't scripted at all in Georg's scenario, became a completely unplanned impromptu etude[6]. It was fortunate we were victorious, but if this went down, then the whole scenario could be transformed into an improvisational play (an ad-lib play without scenario). The talented people around me who could understand subtleties of people were Liscia and Juna-san, and furthermore Excel. However, Liscia and Georg would be despondent and I could consult the plan in secret with Juna-san or Excel.

As the result, because I couldn't use the personnel that I could usually use, this beckoned the current chaotic situation, and that's why there might be a lot of points that I need to reflect upon.

..... Then, although the Three Dukes' War had such up and downs, somehow we could finish the play just as according to Georg Carmine's scenario. Then with this, the curtain descended for Georg's Scenario Program, and finally the curtain can rise for a new Program. This time, the screenwriter are Hakuya and I.

I had said that, 「Hereafter, let the “conquest” begins!」. The『Conquest』 can be thought of as an expression for the suppression of internal rebellion at that time, but it also had the meaning of subjugating the foreign hostile forces in a broader sense of meaning. Now, I want you to try to remember; the Amidonia Dukedom had invaded from the southwest, and it was Georg Carmine's letters that gave them the right timing to spring into action. However, Georg's eyes were only focused on the internal situation, so of course he was “unrelated with the Amidonia Dukedom”.

Then, who was the one who “pretended” to be Georg Carmine and sent the letters to Amidonia? Really... I wonder who the person was.....

『.....This is a worn out method, but this is unexpectedly effective...』(A Certain Realist King)

『After all, people are creatures who believe what they want to believe.』(A Certain Scheming Prime Minister)

..... Now, let's start the conquest.



~ Castle Town『Altomura』Suburb • Second Day, close to evening ~

Although the Amidonia Dukedom had withdrawn their siege according to Wyst Garrow', the Altemura's Lord, appeal, however there were no sign of Altomura's city gate being opened at noon as promised. Tired of waiting, the Amidonian Duke, Gaius VIII ordered the reencirclement, and he also ordered to assault the city after the encirclement had been

completed. However, since besieging a city again after lifting the siege before took a suitably long time, by the time the encirclement was complete, it was already close to evening.

「Curse that Wyst, even if he is just a small fry, he had tricked us like this.」(Gaius)

Gaius who was sitting on the folding chair inside the command tent of the Amidonian Army, was fidgeting his feet in irritation. The officers who were near, were behaving themselves as if nothing happened. If they incurred his fury right now, then their heads might fly away. So of course, the atmosphere at that place was very heavy.

In the middle of that situation, the Duchal Prince Julius, was standing with a nonchalant expression.

「Small fry can only futilely stall for time just like the small fry they are.」(Julius)

「Humph. Certainly it's a futile struggle. It's already too late for him to beg for his life. I will destroy that rural city before sunset arrives. At that time, Wyst, you bastard, I will give you so much torture that you will wish for death before I expose your head at the gate!」(Gaius)

「.....I think that is a splendid idea.」(Julius)

In contrast to Gaius, who lost his head in anger, Julius had an ice-cold expression as an uneasiness sprouted inside his mind. He felt a suspicious presence beyond those walls. Wyst really didn't have any prospects for victory, yet why he was still stalling for time?

At that time, an Amidonian soldier rushed into the command tent to give a report.

「R-Report! A woman appeared atop the Altomuran walls.」(Soldier)

「A woman?」(Gaius)

Hearing the report from the bowing soldier, Gaius knitted his eyebrows.

「What do you mean?」(Gaius)

「That is..... Based on the general who recognized her, that woman is

Elfrieden Kingdom's Navy Admiral, Excel Walter.] (Soldier)

「Excel Walter, you say!? So you say that one of the Three Dukes is inside that castle!？」(Gaius)

Gaius couldn't believe it. Today was just only two days after the day that the Elfrieden King, Souma, sent his Final Counsel to the Three Dukes. Certainly at that time, only the Navy Admiral, Excel Walter, received Souma's authority, but this castle had been sieged only just yesterday, or just one day from the Final Counsel. Her headquarters, Lagoon City, is located at the Northeastern tip of Elfrieden while Altomura is located near the Southwestern end. No matter how fast she rushed, it would take about three to four days to cross that distance. If she was in Lagoon City at the time of the Final Counsel, then she couldn't be possibly be inside Altomura right now.

「How!? How can Excel be here!？」(Gaius)

「.....Perhaps, Excel had already been in cahoots with Souma before the Last Warning even started.」(Julius)

In contrast to Gaius, who was bewildered, Julius had a expression of a person who had finally understood something. The true identity of the vague feeling he felt from Altomura was Excel's shadow. As soon as he noticed this, Julius realized the opponent's trick, and became pale. If Excel was already in league with Souma, then there were possibilities that the other Dukes would also be at Souma's side. If that Last Counsel was just a farce, then.....

Julius stood before his father and spoke out in a mortified tone.

「Father, we must make preparations to retreat right now! We have been lured out!」(Julius)

Gaius was confused by the sudden advice to withdraw.

「Lured out? What do you mean?」(Gaius)

「Perhaps, she received the Last Warning inside Altomura. Our country also has another broadcast orb and that sort of thing isn't unportable.」(Julius)

「Why is it necessary to do such a thing?」(Gaius)

「Of course, because while we were aiming for this city, the enemy's aim is.....」(Julius)

『There is something that I want to announce to all the citizens of Elfrieden Kingdom.』

As if to block Julius' explanation, there was a loud sound that could be heard by the entire Amidonian Army who were besieging Altomura. When they looked at the city, above Altomura's Wall they could see a large figure of person. The height was about 20 meters. If it was real then it would be a giant, however the scenery behind that figure could be seen, so it was just a projection image. The figure who was wearing a military uniform was the Ad Interim[7] King of Elfrieden, Souma Kazuya. Today he didn't wear the clothes he usually wore, but was properly dressed in uniform. Clothes make the man[8], his appearance was more coercive than usual.

Gaius and Julius looked at that Souma with hateful glares.

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『There is something that I want to announce to all the citizens of Elfrieden Kingdom. This is the Ad Interim King of Elfrieden Kingdom, Souma Kazuya.』

Atop Altomuran walls, Excel fixed her eyes at Souma's uniformed appearance with a sublime expression. This "extra-large Souma projection mist" was a work of Excel's magic. With the magic power that was possessed by Excel, who was descended from mizuchi (sea serpents), using magic to imitate the function of the mist scattering device that was used as a Royal Broadcast receiver, was an easy thing to do with plenty of leftover magic power to spare. Why Excel was using her power like this, was so Souma's Royal Broadcast could be "deliberately" watched by the Amidonian Army that was besieging Altomura.

In the projection, Souma explained, in a simple way of talking, the events that had transpired in the Three Dukes Territory up until now that the citizens had only heard from rumors. About how the Royal Army

clashed with the Kingdom's Army as a result of Georg Carmine sheltering the dishonest nobles. About how Castor harbored distrust towards Souma and showed a confrontational attitude. About how only Excel from amongst the Three Dukes, displayed the will to obey his rule from the beginning. Although Souma only stated the truth outspokenly, he didn't talk the matter in detail. However, it was also something inconsequential for the citizens. What they wanted to hear was whether or not they would be dragged into the war.

『There are many things that have happened until now, however as of the present, starting from the Royal Army, the Elfrieden Kingdom's Army, the Navy and the Air Force will be under my command. Therefore, I declare the conclusion of this country's civil war.』

The confrontation between the King and the Three Dukes was over. For the citizens of this country, they would be satisfied just to know about this. However, Excel had a bitter face. Only two days passed from the Last Counsel. During this time, Souma was able to defeat Castor Valgas' Air Force and Georg Carmine's Army. Castor, well, whatever. He was a muscle brain, so by using careful planning, it was possible to resolve it in a short time. However for that Georg to easily surrender, then it was transparent that he had intended to do this in secret.

(Although I think that there was something else since it was achieved in such a short time, but I can guess that they had been colluding ever since the beginning..... His Majesty Souma, Prime Minister Hakuya, and furthermore Georg Carmine..... These young people have done splendidly well to make this old lady dance right into their hands...)

"This too, might because of my age", while complaining, even though her appearance is still so beautiful, Excel sighed as she completely grasped Souma and Georg's plan.

(If it's like that, then they should have tried harder to stop Castor..... Maybe this old neck would be sufficient to save both of their lives.)

While thinking about this, Excel gazed at Souma's projection. Souma had headed towards the climax part of his speech.



『The rebellion has ended. However, we can't sheathe our swords just yet! Why is that? The reason is because, the shameless Amidonia Dukedom's Army used this disorder as a chance to cross over the border and then invaded our country! Currently, the Amidonia Dukedom's Army is besieging Altomura City in the Southwestern Region!』

When the King mentioned the Amidonia Dukedom's Army invasion, half of the Elfrieden citizens were nervous, the other half were surprised. The nervous ones were people who resided in the western area who had heard the rumors of Amidonia Dukedom's invasion, while the surprised ones were the people in the eastern area who still hadn't heard about this information before. They hadn't heard about the information since it was just two days after the Amidonia Dukedom's Army began their invasion.
[9]

So that the citizens, especially those of the eastern area, wouldn't be sent into a panic after hearing this sudden information, Souma addressed them,

『I wish for the citizens to have relief. We had already predicted this, so one of the Three Dukes, Excel Walter, is already inside Altomura. Even though Altomura is currently being besieged by Amidonia, it won't fall.』

After hearing Souma's words, the citizens calmed down a bit. Souma continued speaking.

『Currently, the Kingdom's Army, Navy and Air Force has been placed under the Royal Army. The invading Amidonian Army is roughly 30,000 strong. While the Royal Army, the Kingdom's Army and the Air Force, who will face them, can mobilize about 55,000 soldiers. If the whole army heads towards Altomura, then it will be easy to repulse the savage invaders.』

This statement sent a wave of relief throughout the citizens. However, at the next moment,

『However, my fellow citizens. Is this enough? Will this satisfy you?』

The relief was erased by Souma's raised tone.

『Amidonia Dukedom has long aimed at our country's territory. They extolled the intend to recover the territories they lost to the penultimate[10] king, while increasing their military preparations and always caused tension at the borders. Even right now, the current Amidonian Duke, Gaius VIII, had instigated the confrontation between the Three Dukes and I, and acted behind the scenes for their own self-profits! Then, they raised an army as soon as the Georg Carmine confrontation became definite and then trampled down our territory. In their march, they had burned, slaughtered, and pillaged villages and cities that they passed!』

『My Fellow Citizens! Let me assert this. If in the surrounding countries, there are people like Gaius VIII, then the Elfrieden Kingdom couldn't have its true repose. Because of their selfish desire, they had wounded, raped and killed our fellow countrymen! My Fellow Citizens, can you forgive them?! Can you be satisfied just by repelling them away?! Even though this is the age where the whole Humanity should be united behind the Grand Chaos Empire against the Demon Lords Army, can this act of barbarity that has transgressed this age convention be forgiven?! Nay! Absolutely Nay! Therefore our country, although we had no obligation about it after we had received a surprise attack, intentionally declare...』

Souma paused for awhile after he reached this point, and after taking a deep breath, he clearly declared.

『Our country, the Elfrieden Kingdom has declared war with the Amidonia Dukedom!』

A declaration of war. This caused tension amongst the citizens. It was something unheard of in the age of previous King, Albert. The men were enveloped by a strange excitement, the women afraid, the old people who knew the days of endless war under the penultimate king's conquest war, had an uneasiness about whether or not those days would return. However, Souma spoke out without the slightest waver.

『This broadcast might also be seen by the Amidonia Dukedom's Army. That's why, let me declare this. After this, our 55,000 strong Army that had gathered in the Carmine Duchy would head west. Our target is the capture of the Amidonia Dukedom's Capital 「Van」. While you bastards are being tardy at Altomura, we might already be burning your house.』

And then, when this 『Five Days War』 was converted into plays in the future, this piece of line at the end of Souma's declaration of war scene would become so famous that this line always quoted as the closing speech line (it was just as famous as how Caesar always said 「Alea acta est」 when crossing the Rubicon River and 「Et tu, Brute?」 when being assassinated, no matter what the adaptation was).

『Listen Gaius! We will steal back more things than what you have stolen!』



At the extravagant limousine-like gondola of the Royal Army, 『Royalty Foreign Travel Service Flying Dragon Carriage』 (nicknamed VIP Flying Dragon[11]), was something similar to an airship lifted by four wyverns. When Poncho was gathering food previously, I lend him one of the four wyverns. The inside of gondola was considerably wide and extravagant. I intended to strip the decorations off and sell them when we were still in the middle of financial difficulties, but the prime minister at that time, Marcus, pleaded me while on the verge of tears, 「Please don't sell the things that is the Kingdom's face for foreign nations to see」, so I gave up on this idea.

So inside this VIP Flying Dragon, I declared the declaration of war against the Amidonia Dukedom. In front of me was the Royal Broadcast Orb. No matter how wide the gondola is, loading the orb onto it met with a problem. Since the size was a bit bigger than the ceiling, some parts of the ceiling had to be blown out. Thanks to that, when it was in the middle of the sky right now, the wind blew into the gondola and it was quite chilly. In the middle of the war declaration, my feet trembled (not of fear nor of excitement, but because it was cold); it was good that it didn't get projected.....

「Good work. Now come here.」(Liscia)

After finishing with the war declaration while putting up with the cold, Liscia opened the blanket that covered her and invited me to join. So we both being ended up being tucked underneath the same blanket. Hah, warm... warm... At last a breather. I never thought to be thankful for a person's warmth in this way.

「Ah, cold. If I know that it will be this cold, then I would have gone by ground route.」(Souma)

「The Orb would be impossible to place into a carriage, you know? On the other hand, if we were using Rhinosaurus transportation, then you will be stricken by motion sickness, right?」(Liscia)

「.....So neither one is better.」(Souma)

I had ridden on it when giving disaster relief at the dark elf village, but my feeling after riding it was tremendously bad. Since Hulbert and others travelled using that, I need to make some improvements or else this might trigger a strike. While I was wearily thinking of these things, Carla, who sat in front of me, spat out harsh words.

「Humph. Weak.」(Carla)

The girl, who we brought along as the hostage for the Air Force, didn't wear a blanket or have anything atop her armor, but she didn't look bothered by the cold. Maybe because she is okay because she is a dragonnewt? But a Dragon is a kind of reptile, right?

「Don't lizards go into hibernation when it's cold?」(Souma)

「Don't lump me with that thing! A dragon is strong against both heat and cold! In the first place, this kind of altitude is the natural world for the Air Force!」(Carla)

「Ah, so it's like that.」(Souma)

Now that she mentioned it, the Air Force rode atop their wyvern's back. So this kind of cold air was an everyday occurrence for them. Carla then snorted at me.

「Humph. What you mean by『steal back more things than had been stolen』? The one who lured the Amidonia Dukedom's Army is none other than you!」(Carla)

「.....Ehhh~? So you noticed?」(Souma)

「Everyone who had come this far would notice. Really..... Personally calling the enemy to kill fellow countrymen and then claiming revenge. What a cruel charade. If you scum hadn't lured Amidonia, then..... Gugh.....」

Carla groaned in pain in the middle of her words. It seems that the collar had constricted since she had called her master『Scum』. I think that the『Slave Collar』was too inflexible, and Carla also should have known better by now. While Carla was having a coughing fit, I spoke to her.

「..... of course, I understand. That the victims created by this war are as if I had killed those people myself.」(Souma)

「B-but, the one who thought of this plan was Hakuya, right? Then Souma's responsibility is only.....」(Liscia)

Liscia tried to cover it up for me, but I gently shook my head.

「The one who gave him permission was me. I understood that, and yet, chose it.」(Souma)

Yes. Even though I understood what the plan entailed, I chose it. I couldn't not choose it.

「So far, the Amidonia Dukedom had been threatening this country. If we left them as is, then they could instigate rebelling elements. If this happened, then a lot more people would fall as victims. That's why I chose to use this opportunity to crush them completely. The not-few victims caused by this process, are the sins of the King; my sins. As the one who stood at the top, it would be nice if I wouldn't be excused from the punishment.....」(Souma)

「..... Humph, what a good position you have there.」(Carla)

It seems that Carla had already released from the constriction as she immediately spoke out.

「Do you really think it like that?」(Souma)

I then asked a question and sent a serious look at Carla.

「Even when I understood that it was wrong, I can't not chose it. I can't not sacrifice a few to save many. Furthermore, that sin, couldn't be judged by anyone.」(Souma)

I had once read a book that said 『Punishment is for forgiving a committed sin』. So if there is no one to punish you, then that sin would be unforgiven forever. Even so, I still chose it. Just like a machine that didn't possess a human's heart, I couldn't permit my personal feelings to interfere.

「Each time I need to choose an option, I have to let go of my humanity. Do you envy my position?」(Souma)

「Guh.....」(Carla)

Carla averted her eyes as if to escape from my sight. After the silence continued for a moment, Carla began to speak with an annoyed tone while still averting her eyes.

「Then, why you didn't tell this to my father from the beginning? If you did, then.....」(Carla)

「Do you think that Castor could commit to this kind of secrecy?」(Souma)

「That is.....」(Carla)

「We had already been wagering on many things, so I, and Georg, too, couldn't accept any more risks. In the first place, no matter how much Excel and I gave gentle persuasions, Castor didn't lend his ear to us at all, and the one who wanted to contend was your side, right?」(Souma)

The answer I gave back to her made Carla hang down her head without being able to say anything. Seeing her like this, Liscia wanted to say

something..... But she held it back. As I was looking at both of them like this, I sighed.

(Really..... This is an unpleasant job... Such is being the King.....)

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During the Five Days War, several villages were harmed by the Amidonia Dukedom's Army. It was said that Souma continued to regret this event for the remainder of his life. After the war, the damaged villages and the victims' families received courteous compensation from the country; and the villagers who didn't know anything, respected and extolled King Souma's compassion. However, this only served to torment Souma. It isn't known whether or not this was the reason for it, but afterwards, Souma never took any more plans that could cause victims, regardless of the results.

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『Elfrieden Historical Idiom Lesson』

【Let the farmtown be attacked, to assault the capital】..... An Idiom.
Meaning: Making a small sacrifice, to achieve a bigger profit.

It is based on an event in the Five Days War, when Souma used the Farmtown Altomura as a bait to lure out the Amidonia Dukedom's Army, so that he can use this chance to launch an assault at the Amidonia Dukedom's Capital City.

The quasi-synonym from Earth: 『Cutting one's own flesh, to break the enemy's bone』 (Lose a battle to win the war).

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[1] Or, "Are you F***ing with me?"

[2] In other words, the other rotten nobles might purposefully distanced themselves from the convicted nobles. But since they are still rotten, and they would still do dishonest things behind Souma's back. Eradicating corruption is hard.

[3] Or the Hundred Year Wars, or those major conflicts surrounding

Germany's multiple medieval states for the European reader

[4] In Total War games, you can only execute them if they don't want to pay for the ransom, though... Too bad no slavery option...

[5] Solvency: in finance or business, is the degree to which the current assets of an individual or entity exceed the current liabilities of that individual or entity. In simple words: is your money and assets greater than your debt?

[6] Etude is short musical composition, which tend to be of considerable difficulty. It's mainly for practice. Hence etude (French for study). In other notes, Liszt's and Chopin's etudes are really nice!

[7] Ad interim means "in the meantime", "temporary"

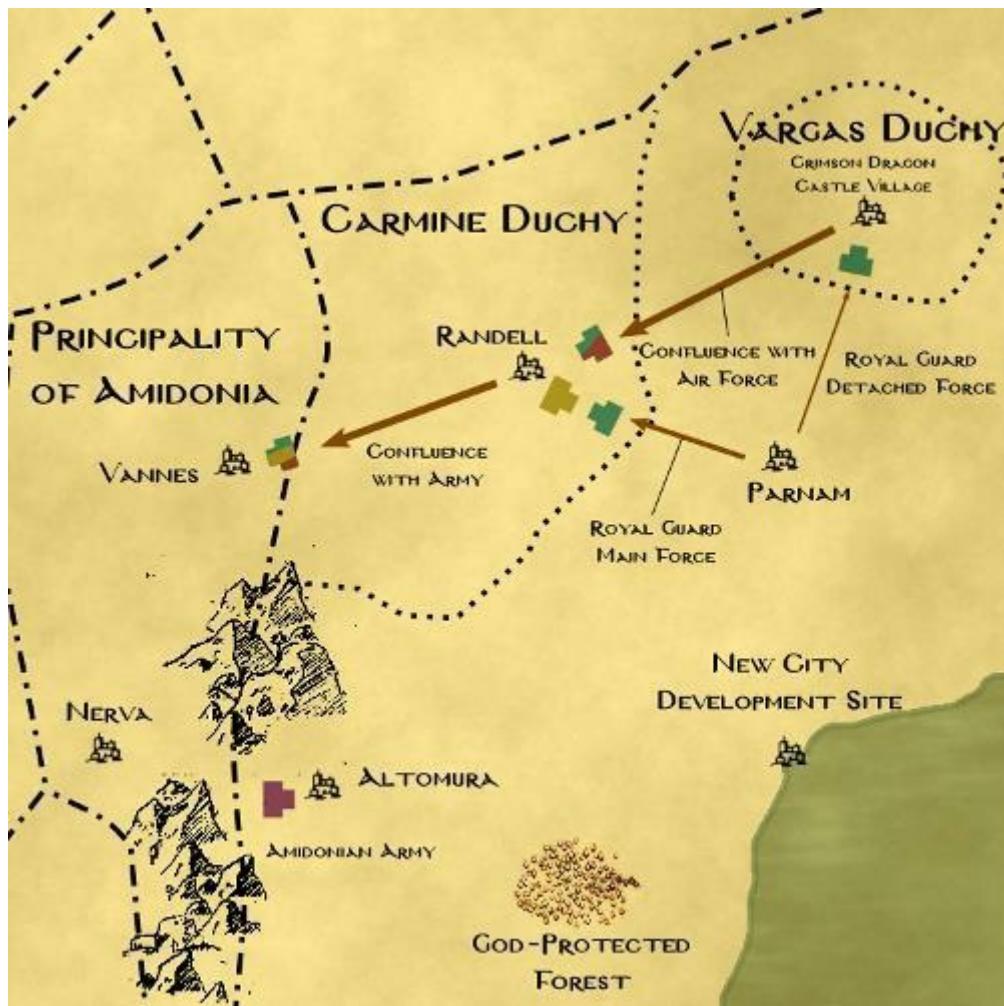
[8] An idiom that means what one wears is taken by others as an essential signal of status.

[9] Since Elfieden sadly lack internet... In our times, if Trump stepped over a kitten, or Putin ate a puppy, the whole world could know in the matter of minutes.

[10] The one before previous king. The kings two period before. Bush is the penultimate president of USA before either Trump or Clinton.....(EN: Bernie Sanders all the way!!) Then it would be anyone but Trump election..... Either way, GOP is in deep feces.

[11] Now... This is something hard to find a similar Western concept... The real nickname in the RAW is 御座敷飛竜. With 御座敷 means a tatami room. A tatami room in a transportation like Ship or Airplane is a very lavish/extravagant thing to have as Tatami Room convey a feeling/sense of home (that's why Tatami room in a RV in the Princess Knight and RV had a deep psychological meaning). So, something that is considered as extravagant... I can't think of anything except... Extravagant... Help me..... (EN: VIP room, indoor hot-tub, VIP guest lounge with a bar) Hmm I think VIP works...

Chapter 10: The Amidonian Army's Three Long Days



[Our Strategic Objective is the Capital of the Principality of Amidonia, Vannes]

Upon hearing Soma's proclamation, the thirty thousand strong Amidonian Army surrounding Altomura withdrew in a hurry. The Admiral of the Navy Ecksel Walter and the Lord of Altomura Wyst Garrote watched the palings and banners they left behind surrounding their camps, shone upon by the afternoon sun, from the walls enclosing Altomura. Looking to his side Wyst found Ecksel's face, enchanting in its beauty under the evening sun.

"... should we not give chase?"

Wyst inquired, as if to cover up his unintentional captivation. Ecksel, however, shook her head quietly.

"They have wyvern cavalry in their rear guard. Without wyvern cavalry

of our own, we will be receiving a hard counterattack if we were to leave the fort in pursuit. Gaius VIII ... as expected from the one who fastidiously continued sharpening their fangs toward our country. All's well when he stays within the palm of His Majesty's hand, though"

So Ecksel said as she closed her eyes, which made Wyst widen his eyes in surprise. The Duchess Ecksel who treats everyone she sees as children could value somebody this highly, this may have never happened before.

"Is His Highness Soma really possessed of such ingenuity?"

"Not really so much in plain ingenuity, I think, but he is able to come up with exemplary plans befitting each situation. It's as if 'he knew of similar battles'"

"What do you mean by that?"

"... It may be possible that His Highness Soma had come from a world teeming with dreadful trickery"

Wyst felt a shudder come upon him. He had heard that King Soma was a hero summoned from another world. Assuming that the other world had experienced such horrible turbulent times where many countries perished and countless lives were lost, then should that world and this one be connected, would the people of this one stand a chance against theirs? Even the young King who does not look to be suited for the battlefield from what he saw of him was able to come up with plans to this extent. Of course, to fear the sky falling above their heads would literally be a needless fear

"That is ... an incredible thing, isn't it"

"Yes, truly ... now then"

Ecksel clapped as if to shift her gears.

"I suppose our part ends here"

"... It may be late of me to say this Lady Ecksel, but couldn't you just throw down the Amidonians with your magic power even without having to stall for time?"

Wyst's point was answered by Ecksel with a smile.

"Ara, you can't rely on this old grandma all the time. Wouldn't it be an elder's duty to watch the young ones struggle with all they have"

"As you say ..."

Wyst was astonished, but contrary to her expression, Ecksel was tantalized inside.

(Working behind the scenes is what was wanted of me this time. Considering what would happen to Carla after this, I would have liked to earn some more merit in battle ... but being too conspicuous would leave a bad impression on His Highness)

She sighed inwardly, but Ecksel isn't one to show something like that on her face.

"Now then, let's leave the rest to the little children and head south as planned"

As she said that, Ecksel thought of 'another one of the little children'.

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Under the twilight, with the moon hidden behind a cloud, the Amidonian officers and soldiers ran holding torches in their hands. The sight of the flock of the thirty thousand soldiers' torches looked like a creeping snake. A fantastic sight, when viewed from afar, but the people in question only ran and ran, drenched in sweat and smeared with mud.

At the front of the ranks, there was the Prince of Amidonia, Gaius VIII, among the leading cavalry. He pressed his horse earnestly forward while surrounded by five of his guarding cavalry officers who each was holding torches. He had a grim look on his face. All this was because of that youngster King. He lured Gaius and his men out using the land they once lost, the bountiful grain-producing region, as bait, exposing the soft underbelly of Vannes that rightly should have been protected like armor, and struck there.

Georg Carmine who should have been blocking the way to the capital

capitulated in a mere two days, and the Elfrieden Army marched towards Vannes as if they were merely passing through the Carmine Duchy. Vannes was a town constructed as the front line to defend against invasions from Elfrieden, and conversely a foothold for when they invaded into Elfrieden. For that reason, there were no fortresses to block the Elfrieden Royal Army's march towards Vannes. That came out of pride and self conceit from previous King Albert's conservativeness and that the Elfrieden of now had no courage to attack other countries.

Now that it's come to this, Gaius noticed that he had been duped by Soma and Georg. Tactician, someone who indulges in strategy. A strategist could forget that he could sometimes be ensnared by tactics. This was exactly the situation Gaius was in.

(What is this! How could that weak Elfrieden make us experience this much hardship!)

The erstwhile 'Kingdom of Amidonia' lost half its territory and died under the antepenultimate King of Elfrieden's expansionist policies. Gaius' father renamed the [Kingdom of Amidonia] to [Principality of Amidonia], lest they forget the chagrin, saying we can't call ourselves a Kingdom now that we've lost half our land, and named himself a [Prince]. The Principality of Amidonia had worked under the policy of regaining their lost lands and vigilantly watched for the chance to do so ever since.

After the antepenultimate King died and Alberto inherited the throne¹, Amidonia made use of his conservativeness and fanned disturbing elements within Elfrieden. That continued even after Gaius' father died and Gaius VIII inherited the throne. Most of the disturbing elements were crushed by Georg and Ecksel, but the Kingdom's power was steadily drained. It went well.

¹ or more accurately, married the daughter of the antepenultimate King, who inherited the throne

Alberto didn't amount to much, but the difference in power between the Kingdom and the Principality was certainly great. Amidonia, who was the lesser in terms of power, can do nothing but intently watch and wait for

an opportunity. Then, the time they had been waiting for came at last. The Demon King Territory appeared, food and economic shortages caused by the Demon King Army sapped the Kingdom, the drama of the sudden change in kingship, and the Three Dukes who should have been protecting the Kingdom rebelled against the new King. This was a good opportunity. The Kingdom couldn't move now even if they wanted to. Amidonia's long-standing desire has now come to bear fruit.

... or that was how it was supposed to be, but what of the reality? The one being cornered was rather the Principality.

(If we lose Vannes now, Amidonia will never rise again for a second time. I can't show my face to the ancestors' spirits if that were to happen)

Gaius grimaced in regret.

(But no! It's still not over yet! Vannes is a sturdy fortress. We have left five thousand of our finest to defend it, they could hold two or three days against a large army. If we reached Vannes in that time and caught the Royal Army by surprise in a pincer attack, we could still win this!)

Gaius encouraged himself, then...

“Father!”

Julius' horse came running up to Gaius' horse.

“We are marching too fast! If we keep on, let alone the supply wagons, the foot soldiers are going to drop dead! Please loosen the pace a little ...”

“Silence!”

Gaius cut down Julius' proposal with a roar.

“If we lose Vannes we will never rise again! We have to reach Vannes before it falls no matter what it takes. We will conduct a pincer attack on the Kingdom's troops with the soldiers inside the fort!”

Seeing Gaius' passionate speech, Julius felt a tinge of unease. He can't help but feel that Gaius was currently putting too much emphasis on the capital and was being too passionate about it.

“Father, even if we lose Vannes our troops are still in good health. Can't

we hold up in another well-defended city and ask the Empire for help? At any rate, we, unlike Elfrieden, are signatory to the [Humanity Declaration]"

[Declaration of Humanity's Coalition against Demonkind], commonly called [Humanity Declaration], was a policy promoted by the biggest power in the human's side of the continent, the [Grand Chaos Empire]²

² Details are in chapter 1, Hide a Knife Behind a Smile.

First, to allow no change in borders due to wars or military operations between humans.

Second, to respect the rights to equality and self-determination of all peoples within all nations.

(Meaning, because national borders are not to be shifted, to disallow the banishment and persecution of minority peoples within the countries)

Third, for countries far from the Demon King Territory to support the bulwarks that are the countries near the Territory.

These were the three main clauses of the [Humanity Declaration]. The Principality of Amidonia signed this Humanity Declaration, but as for Elfrieden, they did not sign even after King Soma was enthroned. Because of that, Amidonia could claim to have lost territory to the Empire and as the leader of the Humanity Declaration, would come to the aid of their ally Amidonia and press Elfrieden to return their lost territory (not including the lands lost prior to the Declaration).

Attacking others themselves and complaining when they were attacked back. It was as Finance Minister Colbert said before the departure to the war, a terrible sophistry, but the fault lies with Elfrieden who did not sign the [Humanity Declaration]. Julius thought this was a good idea. However,

"You fool! The Empire aren't such simpletons!"

Gaius decidedly cut him off.

"We exploited a loophole in the Declaration in this war. Sure, they

might come to our help if we lodged a complaint, but an illogical act like that would leave a bad impression of us. They would likely use this as an excuse to exclude the two of us and make a puppet out of our country”

” ”

Being told off like that, Julius could not find the words to reply. Looking at Julius in such a state, Gaius snorted, hmph, and loudly ordered

“If you understand then hurry up! We will reach Vannes before it fell by any means necessary!”

However, the forced march was interrupted. Elfrieden and Amidonia are separated in the south by the border of the Ursula mountain range. When the Army entered the route that leads through that mountain range, their men and horses began to be tripped up by muddy ground one after the other.

“W, what’s with all this mud!?”

“Shit, my horse’s stuck! Somebody pull me up!”

“Oi oi, there was nothing like this when we came, was there!?”

It was a spectacle of horses being stuck in the mud here and there and men stumbling and squirming where their feet were tripped up by the mud. Seeing the disastrous sight, Gaius was dumbfounded. Gordoa valley was a road they went through when they came. At that time the ground was firm and dry, and in no way would trip up feet.

“What’s happening ... I don’t think there had been any rain. How did the road become this bad”

At that moment, one of the soldiers shouted as if in answer to Gaius.

“E, Enemies!”

The next moment there was the sound of arrows cutting through air in the darkness and the sound of something violently breaking. Each time the sound was heard one Amidonian soldier after another would fall. One of the torch-bearers near Gaius fell with a muffled voice, fanning Gaius’ impatience.

“What is it! What’s happening!”

Then, one of the soldiers came running and reported.

“It’s an enemy attack! It appears Elfrieden had hidden soldiers in the valley in ambush! The enemy’s hiding among the trees in the mountains, and are attacking with arrows and ice!”

“Ice you say!?”

“In all likelihood, the enemy had water mages among them!”

“That wretched.... So the bad ground is also their doing!”

Gaius twisted his face in fury. Julius desperately calmed him down.

“Please calm down Father! The main Elfriedenian troops are headed for Vannes so there shouldn’t be that many hidden here. Those narrow paths also couldn’t hold a large army. We should first prioritize getting out of this valley as fast as possible”

“Grrr, but how, with the road this bad?”

“... It can’t be helped. Let’s have the footmen go first. We will go where their feet don’t trip”

Gaius widened his eyes to Julius’ heartless proposal.

“You want to use our men as stepping stones!?”

“It can’t be helped. If you were to be shot down the Amidonian Army would collapse and we won’t be able to fight with Elfrieden. Your decision, please”

“... I suppose it can’t be helped”

Groping for a path by sacrificing the soldiers. If Soma were in Gaius’ boots, he would anguish over the choice, but Gaius’ decision was swift.

The Amidonian ‘desire for revenge’ against Elfrieden had already become his identity. Even when surrounded by powerful countries, falling into food and economic hardships, the reason the Amidonians’ hearts did not break can be said to be this desire for revenge against Elfrieden. Even if they were suffering, they will be satisfied if Elfrieden suffered more.

They believed the cause of their suffering was not their upper brass overinvesting in the military even as the people were suffering, but because Elfrieden snatched away their former wealth. This even as over fifty years had passed. Even as the people was in this state, for the upper brass, they will throw away anything and everything for the sake of fighting Elfrieden. In this country now, Colbert and Roroa who thought to make do with what they had are the exceptional ones.

Which is why for Gaius, it was a greater problem to not be able to fight Elfrieden than losing some of his soldiers. This is why he could give the order without hesitation.

“Move the soldiers forward! We have to hurry and get out of the valley!”

As the inhumane order went, the ranks reversed with the soldiers going at its head, and the cavalry continued behind them along the safe path leaving behind the men caught in the mud unable to move. It was a terrible spectacle. Being caught in the mud was bad enough, but because of the chaos from the surprise attack the ranks fell out of order and the disordered movement caused some to step on the men stuck in the mud as they marched on. Some died a death too horrible to look at, being trampled down by horses.

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map-02-10-2

There was a group watching the hellish scene from the slopes surrounded by trees.

They were clad in blackened leather armor, equipped with bows and magic staves, and had black cloth wrapped around their faces. They were the surprise attack unit who attacked the Amidonian Army just moments ago. They numbered around two thousand. At the center of the group was a person with a smallish build who was clearly female from her outstanding proportions even with her costume being what it is.

She was the leader of the black clothed unit, and what she saw was the Amidonian Army proceeding without helping their comrades caught in the mud but rather trampling them down. She shivered, so this is the

extent of cruelty that man would go in order to save their own lives.

(A King would have to give out harsh orders every now and again, but I can't come to like someone who gives the order so unhesitatingly, not as a person, let alone a King)

As she was thinking, one of her men came up to her with a report.

"Lady 'Canaria', the Amidonian Army has left the Valley. Should we give chase?"

The leader shook her head to the subordinate giving the report.

"No need. Our job was to disturb and trip the enemy's movements. There's also only two thousand of us, we won't be able to produce any better results even if we pursued them. I consider this job well done. Prepare to withdraw"

"Mam"

After the subordinate went away, she unwrapped the black cloth over her face. Right that instant, the cloud covering the moon went away and the moonlight shone upon her beautiful 'blue hair'. She was the songstress Juna who only by brushing up a stray hair would make for a beautiful picture. Before the King, she was the songstress who owned the music café [Lorelei], but within the Royal Navy, she was the leader of their two thousand elites who was gathered on the premise of working on the ground, 'Canaria'. Yes, this surprise attack was conducted by Ecksel's subordinates, the Royal Marine Corps.

Having successfully accomplished her task, Juna pat her chest in relief.

(After Grandmother did her job so well, I couldn't afford to fail here)

By Grandmother she meant Ecksel Walter. Other than "Songstress" and "Canaria", Juna also held the role of being Ecksel Walter's granddaughter. Indeed, being so long-lived and having so many lovers, Ecksel had a great many children. She had so many relatives that if one were to put together all her grandchildren ... and great grandchildren, one would be able to create a small town with them. Because having so many relatives would allow her to usurp the whole country with just her descendants alone, she

kept the name ‘Walter’ for herself to avert any suspicion of ulterior motives and severed relations with all her children once they’re grown up, sending them off to other houses. Juna was the daughter of one such son of Ecksel’s that married into another family.

Seeing the Amidonian troops being cruelly left behind made a grimace came upon Juna’s beautiful face that she inherited from Ecksel.

“... If we leave them be, we would risk wild animals acquiring a taste for human flesh. Take anyone who’s still breathing as prisoners, we’ll bury the rest”

“Are we helping the Amidonian troops?”

“The soldiers abandoned by their own King was saved by Soma who should rightly have been the enemy. The rumors will raise His Majesty’s fame, which wouldn’t be a bad thing”

“I see”

Just like the mood about her, Juna had a mature line of thought. As she gave instructions to her subordinates, she cast her eyes north. It was the direction where Soma would be right about this time.

(Your Highness. May the fortunes of war be with you)

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The march of the Amidonian Army after having received the attack at the Gordoa Valley had a greatly subdued speed. When they regrouped their forces after having left the valley, their thirty thousand strong numbers was reduced by fifteen thousand. This includes not only the death toll of the surprise attack and those trampled to death after having been caught in the mud, but also a considerable number of those who deserted from the ranks. Also, because the supply troops had deserted the wagons when they ran, the Amidonian Army was attacked by not just fatigue but also hunger.

With the soldiers’ stress reaching its peak, not knowing when it will erupt, and also with their numbers reduced to a mere fifteen thousand, it had become harder to win against the fifty-five thousand Elfriedenian

Royal Army even if they were to conduct a pincer attack with the defenders of Vannes. The first thing Gaius VIII did in this situation was to lay the blame for the loss of the provisions on the commanding officer of the supply troop and took his head in order to soothe the soldiers' anger. Next, he scraped up fighting men from the surrounding villages and towns and conscripted the townspeople, somehow restoring their numbers to twenty-five thousand in this way. Of course, he invited discontent in the process, but with the life and death of the country at stake, Gaius had no room to worry about that.

Although he somehow at least regained his numbers, the process of gathering provisions and troops delayed their movements, and only after two whole days since their retreat they were able to restart towards their goal of reaching Vannes. Then half a day after that, the noon of the fifth day counting from the day the first of the series of battles, the [Battle of the Crimson Dragon Castle Village] broke out, the Amidonian Army finally came within a day's march away from Vannes.

However, the Amidonian Army had made a fatal mistake these few days.

They had marched too quickly. One may think what's wrong with that? Didn't even Sun Tzu say that [speed is the essence of war]?, but where in the original text he said [Though we have heard of stupid haste in war, cleverness is never associated with long delays]³ he meant that "in war, because of the consumption of national resources, it is beneficial to be short and brief, and there is seldom benefit to a protracted war".

³ «TN: Sun Tzu. The Art Of War, ch. II : Waging War»

Which is why what would be best applied to the Amidonian Army was what Sun Tzu said afterwards:

[Maneuvering with an army may be advantageous, or they may be dangerous. If you set a fully equipped army in march in order to snatch an advantage, the chances are that you will be too late. On the other hand, to detach a flying column for the purpose involves the sacrifice of its baggage and stores]⁴

⁴ «TN: Sun Tzu. The Art Of War, ch. IX : Maneuvering the Army»

[War] is a competition of who takes the strategically important positions first. In case of the Battle of Yamazaki between Hashiba Hideyoshi and Akechi Mitsuhide, this strategic position is “Mt. Tennou”, and in the case of the Russo-Japanese war, it’s “203 Hill”. Certainly, if one were to be able to acquire these strategic positions before the enemy did, the battle will proceed more favorably. However, Sun Tzu said that persistently competing with the enemy for these strategic positions is a dangerous act. If one were to march one’s entire army there they would fall behind the enemy, whereas if one were to dispatch a quick force the force would have to leave the supply transports behind. Thus no matter how important the strategic position is, the act would have been meaningless.

Sun Tzu also said that by marching a hundred li⁵ only 10% of one’s army will reach its destination, and the leaders of all one’s three divisions will fall to the hands of the enemy, whereas by marching fifty li, only half one’s force will reach the goal and the leader of one’s first division will be torn away. Securing the strategic position will exhaust the army and without supplies there would be nothing one could do. Looking once again at the actions of the Amidonian Army, they stubbornly persist in gaining the strategic position of the capital Vannes, discarding their supply train, and their soldiers had been exhausted by harassment. This is exactly what Sun Tzu called a foolish move.

⁵ «TN: 1 li = about 416 meters (1365 ft) in Sun Tzu’s time, so 100 li would be around 41 km (26 miles), and 50 li would be about 20 km (13 miles)»

Now, what the Amidonian Army saw as they approached the plains several ten-odd kilometers south of Vannes was the ranks of ‘The Elfrieden Royal Army in perfect health waiting for them to arrive’. Seeing the ranks, Gaius felt his strength leave him and nearly fell out of his horse.

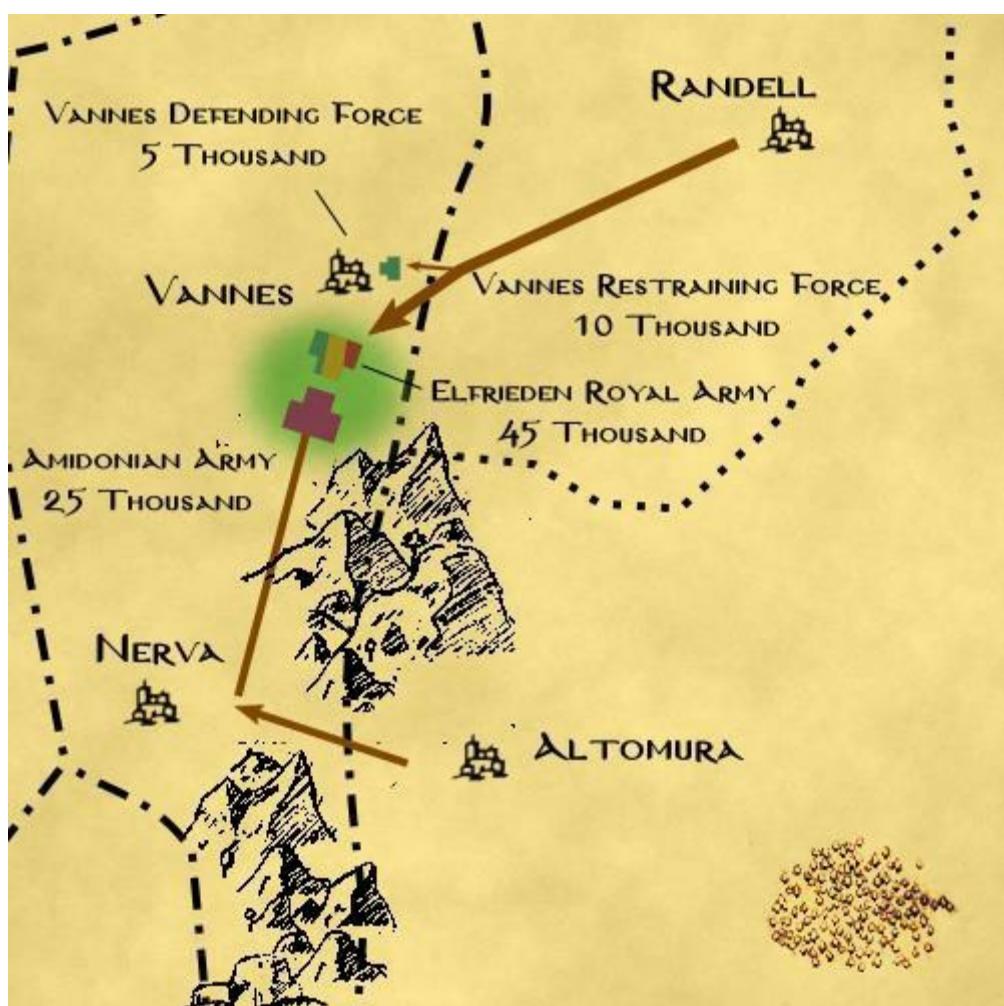
“Impossible ... has, has Vannes been captured already ...?”

There was nobody there who could answer his mutterings.



Jumping straight to the conclusion, at this time, the capital of the Principality of Amidonia, Vannes, still hasn't fallen.

The fifty-five thousand strong Elfriedenian Royal Army under Soma arrived at Vannes one day earlier than the Amidonians, but didn't attack the five thousand elite troops barring themselves inside Vannes. Instead, they allotted ten thousand troops to keep the fort's defenders in check while the main army moved to a plain ten-odd kilometers south of Vannes and lay in wait for the eventual coming of the Amidonian Army main force.



Yes, Soma's aim from the start had been the Amidonian Army main force. This was the reason why he deliberately told Gaius of the strategic objective that he should rightly have concealed. By declaring "I will attack Vannes", he would wait and crush the Amidonian Army who would come in panic. Of the thirty-six stratagems of Sun Tzu, this was a plan implementing number six: "Make a sound in the east, then strike in the west". It was also the reenactment of the "Battle of Maling", which was

the namesake of number two: “Besiege Wei to rescue Zhao”. It was a plan to run from and capture the rival of the second Sun Tzu, Sun Bin – namely Pang Juan. The likes of Gaius could not have seen through it.

Facing the twenty-five thousand Amidonian Army who was all exhausted and had lost most of their supply train, was the Elfrieden Royal Army who was in high spirits after having eaten the ‘provisions for the whole army’ prepared by Poncho and resting in these plains for a whole day. A completely rested fifty-five thousand versus an exhausted twenty-five thousand. It can be said that the direction of the battle was already obvious before it even began.

At the headquarters established in the center of the crane wing formation of the Elfrieden Royal Army, Soma who had been sitting on a stool stood up, raised his right hand, and swung it down toward the Amidonian Army.

“Charge”

Chapter 11: Decisive Battle (First Part)

Looking at the plays of later years, many among them depict Soma Kazuya as an enlightened ruler blessed with both wisdom and courage. A benevolent lord, who in his bravery would defeat a great many men of valor in single combat, and with his wisdom he would trifle with the enemy, and guide the people through outstanding political measures to prosperity. Historians, however, denied this valuation. While he certainly did establish an Empire that ruled over huge tracts of land, but his own personal abilities was not all so great. This was the prevailing opinion.

To begin with, throughout his lifetime Soma did not conduct more foreign wars than he could hold in one hand, and he did not have so many chances to show his mettle in the field of battle. Almost all of the military exploits handed down to posterity belonged to his subordinates. There was also no proof that the wisdom to trifle with the enemy belonged to him as well. Since there were many resourceful people in his employ during his reign, beginning with the later prime minister Hakuya, he could simply have selected the best among the suggestions they proposed.

Looking at his political measures, while he certainly had a lot of outstanding ones, the fact that they led all the people to prosperity was suspect. Time and time again, Soma can be seen agonizing on his position. If all his policies accomplished good things then he should not have been so anguished. Thus it was the common opinion of historians that Soma's own abilities did not tower high above the rest as the plays often depict.

Nevertheless, only few consider Soma as anything but an enlightened ruler on account of those. There was another common opinion historians held in regard of Soma, namely that "he excels at gathering and using people". Even though Soma's capabilities were not a tower above others, he was an exemplary prodigy at sending the right personnel to the right place and gathering the right number of soldiers to the right fields. The victory at the five-day war that first made Soma's name across the

continent owed much to this talent of his.

Able to know what he could and what he could not do, able to entrust what he could not do to a person who could, this could just be the one most important ability for an Emperor to have.



"I didn't expect them to be this persistent ..."

In the Elfrieden Royal Army main camp, I was looking down surprised at the Amidonian Army's unexpectedly strenuous fighting. Even though it should have been very clear who would win between the [55 thousand high spirited Elfrieden Royal Army] and the [25 thousand completely exhausted Amidonian Army], the Amidonians were putting up a tough fight. Rather, can we really break through them?

Firstly, both the Elfriedenian and Amidonian wyvern cavalries broke into dogfights. Having not fallen under the attack at Gordoa Valley and not tired out due to riding on their wyverns, the Amidonian wyvern cavalry were their most healthy forces. They numbered less than a thousand, but by being on the defensive, even the Elfriedenian wyvern cavalry could not make a breakthrough even with about twice their numbers. Having air superiority would decide the course of the battle but it looks like that wouldn't be settled anytime soon.

In the end, I had to entrust the course of the fight on the battle on land. The Elfriedenian ranks are arranged in a crane wing formation. At the center there was Ludwin with ten thousand Royal Guard footmen and Royal Knights, at the left wing was Glaive with fifteen thousand of the Royal Army (Hulbert and Kaede are in this group), while at the right wing was Liscia with fifteen thousand of the Royal Army and the reinforcements from the Dark Elf village. Truthfully, I wanted her to stay here at the main camp, but the Army was overbearingly brought over and was still in confusion so there was presently nobody else but her that could bring the Army together. So I reluctantly allowed it.

While in the Army she somewhat had the position of an idol, and having received Georg's education, there was no problem with her

command, so I judged that there would be little resistance against her. I tentatively attached Aisha as her guard, but I hope she won't be too rash, she's a princess after all. For that reason, the only one here in the main camp behind Ludwin's center wing that I can talk to was the hostage Carla.

Even though she was a hostage, her arms and legs weren't bound. With the slave collar on her, her neck would be strangled if she tried to run or harbored intent to kill me, so it's safe. She could easily kill me by snatching a sword from a nearby soldier or simply by stabbing me with her sharp nails, but ... well, such is life. I started a chat with Carla.

"What do you think? I thought they'd break more easily"

"Hmph ... no one fights a battle expecting to lose. They'd be desperate to not lose"

"I suppose you have a point there"

Carla was surprisingly talkative, it might've bored her out to just stand there. Being a former Air Force commander, she'd understand the tide of battle better than me.

"Our left and right wings, Liscia and Glaive's troops don't look like they're moving much. Don't you think they should try and move more actively to surround and destroy the enemy?"

"... If you think that way then you should send the order by a fast horse. Y ... you're the King, aren't you?"

She was about to say something rude¹ but immediately changed it. Seems like she could learn. Being challenged by Carla, I thought things over, but

¹ «TN: She was about to say kisama but immediately changed to anata»

"... I'll pass. I'm only familiar with battles on paper. Rather than me, I suppose Liscia would understand the command better. It'd be better to rely on the people on the field rather than make a clumsy order"

That was my answer. Carla turned away with a hmph. Looks like I got it

right. Her reaction was easy to read.

"You'd know the reason wouldn't you, Carla? Can you tell me?"

"... It's the enemy numbers"

"Numbers?"

Carla pointed disinterestedly at the battlefield.

"I've only heard this is passing, but those were the thirty thousand Amidonian Army that sieged Altomura, right? And they took a surprise attack when they retreated"

"That's correct"

"So their numbers don't look to have decreased much to me"

"Hm? Now that you mention it ..."

I couldn't see it at a glance since it's such a large army, but they numbered only slightly less than half our fifty-five thousand strong. It looks like they didn't take much damage after having received Juna's Marines' surprise attack at Gordoa Valley.

"So the surprise attack didn't bear so much fruit?"

"No, from looking at the trend of battle, I can see there's a difference in morale between soldiers in the Amidonian side. They probably had their numbers reduced by the surprise attack and supplemented it by conscripting people from towns along the way. That's why some of them had such low morale"

"I see ..."

The countries of this world normally had standing armies. Being so rampant in large animals that aren't all too different to monsters to a person from Earth, it was necessary to maintain an army that they could move at any moment. For Elfrieden, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Royal Guard soldiers were our standing army. Of course, when push comes to shove, we would conscript soldiers from the populace, and truth be told, the armies of the nobles besides the three dukes were mostly such conscripts. After the war, I plan on also bringing in these nobles' armies

and consolidating them into a single army, but for the conscripted populace, I plan on having them return to their towns. Rather than the decrease of fighting power, I'm more concerned about raising productivity right now.

Naturally, the Amidonian Army attacking us should consist of the standing army and a number of conscripts as well, and everyone that are fit for conscription should have already been conscripted. This means that the ones newly conscripted after the surprise attack would be 'those who were not fit for conscription the first time round'. For instance, they could be those who had grown old, those who had gone weak, or maybe adventurers who just happen to be in the country². Their morale couldn't be as high, was what Carla was saying.

² There is a contract between the countries and the adventurers' guild wherein adventurers inside the country could be conscripted on the country's hour of need. The quid pro quo was that the country pays an annual fee to the guild, so I had long already discontinued the contract.

"You can leave those kinds of people alone and they'll break on their own. On the other hand, if you surround and press down on them, there's a danger that they would consolidate. That's why Glaive and Liscia are waiting for them to break rank and flee"

"I see. So the best thing is to leave these matters to the people on the field"

I knew it, so it was best to leave it to the people on the field when something like this happens. I suppose it's about right for the general to get bored at headquarters.

"... You're quite useless aren't you. Is that how a King's supposed to be?"

"A King's job is before and after the war. Oh, and also ... when push comes to shove, to beg for the lives of his soldiers by offering his neck"

As I said so, Carla looked at me with wide eyes as if seeing something unbelievable. What? Did I say something weird?

"Y ... you³, aren't you afraid of death?" Carla asked. What are you

talking about?

³ «TN: Kisama – anata switch again»

“Of course I’m afraid. I’m not a suicide applicant”

“But, you said you’d offer your neck just now. That means that right?”

“Eh ... ah ... I see. That was weird ...”

Now that it’s mentioned, why did I say I’ll offer my neck so easily? I do know that it’s expected of me as a lord, but why did I feel that it’s ‘the obvious thing’? Why? Wasn’t I a coward? Wasn’t I worried for my own well-being? Didn’t I take the throne and worked hard with municipal affairs because I didn’t want to be presented to the Empire? Since when did I learn to be so bold as to be able to cast off my own life without regret?

Seeing me in such a state, Carla seemed like she was seeing something pitiful.

“Are you broken somewhere?”

“.....”

Broken. As a person. Broken. Somewhere.

Hm, feels like I found the answer. I only noticed when she pointed it out, but my state of mind right now is strange. I think I’m looking at lives lightly. My own, and also those of others. Which is why I could add and subtract them so easily. Calculate the (number of lives saved) – (number of lives lost), and if the answer comes up positive, then take that choice. Like a system made to do such thing.

“Ah ... so it’s something like that”

“Hm?”

“Before I noticed, I might have been acting under a ‘King’ system. It’s as if I was able to come up with the best decision because I’m programmed for it”

“She-stem? Prog-ram? Oi, what are you talking about!?”

Carla yelled, and I smiled in self-derision.

“Carla, I might really be a ‘fake King’ after all”

“Wha!?”

“You see, I couldn’t send soldiers to battle without ‘turning into a King’”⁴

⁴ «TN: i.e. a real King wouldn’t have to turn into anything – just be himself»

I’m a coward. I don’t like hurting, I don’t like dying. I don’t want to see others hurt or die, either. In order for such a me to attend a battle, I had no other choice but to ‘turn into’ a King under a State system, to tell myself, because you’re a King, this is what you do, to seal my ego and do what needs to be done. Otherwise, I would be crushed under the weight of the lives lost due to my choices.

“I can’t laugh at the previous King. If there’s a replacement I’ll go resign right away”

“... why are you voicing your weakness to me”

“It’s the other way round. I can’t possibly voice them to Liscia and the others”

I’ll only needlessly worry them. Especially Liscia, she’s very earnest, she even considered pressing the throne on me her own responsibility

That moment, something changed in the battlefield before my eyes.

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The Amidonian Army began to crumble. Deserters began to appear from among the Amidonians who had until now braved the superior numbers of the Elfriedenian Army. They were the people hurriedly conscripted along the way from Gordoa Valley up to this place. Amidonian youths are mandatorily appointed to military training once they reached a certain age, but they were people who normally lived civilian lives. Being suddenly drawn into a battleground where they had the disadvantage couldn’t be good for their morale.

Finally, deserters began to appear, fleeing towards the still not encircled

southern side. Though the Amidonian side would cut down anyone trying to flee in order to make them continue the battle, the effort was bound to fail since the conscripted soldiers numbered almost ten thousand. Furthermore, the more deserters tried to flee, the more their ranks broke, throwing even the intact platoons into disarray. The Elfriedenians did not miss this chance.

“Hal, now nanodesu!”

“I’ve been waiting for this! Come on you bastards!”

“”” OOOOOOOHHHH!!! “””

The Kingdom’s left wing received Kaede’s green light, and Hulbert led soldiers in a charge in order to complete the encirclement. They went without horses into the disarrayed enemy, swinging around pairs of pikes. Noticing the situation, one of the Amidonian commanders shouted atop his horse.

“Don’t let the enemy complete the circle! Stop the left wing with ranged attacks!”

Immediately, arrows and magic flew, aimed at the troop led by Hulbert. However,

[Earth Wall]

The hundred meter long, two to three meter tall earthen wall Kaede summoned covered Hulbert’s troop at the critical moment. This should surprise even the Amidonians. There shouldn’t even be five mages in the whole continent who could instantly create an earth wall of this size. Kaede Foxia had a timid character, but in respects to her head and her skill with earth magics, she was a talent among talents. Hulbert pressed his back to the wall and ordered his men who were likewise hiding themselves.

“Don’t let Kaede steal the show! Let’s fire back!”

“”” OU! “””

Now, it was Hulbert’s turn to fire arrows and magic at the Amidonians

from behind the wall. Hulbert threw the lances he once unleashed at the Zemish mercenaries at the Amidonian Army. Since the Amidonians were poised to attack, they were not able to shift to defense in face of this attack in time. They were shot and burned, and a great disturbance came upon their ranks. Taking it as a chance, Hulbert jumped out.

“Let’s do it now that they’re confused! We’re striking in one go!”

On the other side, the side of the confused Amidonians, their general tried to calm the confusion down.

“Everyone, do not falter! You’re only falling into the enemy’s scheme by getting confused!”

He frantically tried to reorganize the soldiers but they didn’t show any signs of becoming ordered.

“Quiet down! I’ll lop off your head like this guy here if you don’t!”

“No you shut up!”

“What!?”

The general noticed too late, Hulbert was already before his eyes with crossed arms. When Hulbert uncrossed his arms the blade of his lances had already clamped on his torso like a pair of scissors, cutting him along with the head of his horse. The upper half of what was once the general fell down on the ground with a thud, spraying blood. The sight thoroughly drained the Amidonians of fighting spirit.

“So who’s next!”

Blood dripped from the lances in both of Hulbert’s hands, making him look like a demon raksasha. The Amidonians felt as if they were caught in the darkness with an oni, and began to flee. This was the later testimony of a former Amidonian soldier who saw Hulbert that day and barely survived:

[He didn’t feel real that day. Still such a young man and yet you can’t call him anything but an experienced warrior. When I heard them later calling him the “Red Demon Hal”, it was strangely appropriate. Truly ...

such was the vigor he had ...]

Thus begins the heroic saga of Soma's follower, who would later be called [Red Demon Hal]. His battle style of leading from the head and pushing through never changed even after he became a general. Soma and the others would time and time again admonish him that what he's doing was not appropriate for someone who leads, but he would not heed them, saying "this way feels more like it". Soma was unable to say anything more because he was actually able to survive each battle properly, causing great worry for Kaede, but that is another story.



"HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!"

At the right wing of the Elfriedenian Royal Army, Liscia was raging. Even as the commander of the right wing, she urged her horse forward and came out rather considerably on the front line. Every time Liscia thrusted her rapier at the enemy ranks, blades of ice would appear and cut down the Amidonian soldiers. Her figure was beautiful like a Valkyrie but on the other hand, she also seemed to be somewhat impatient and had lost her cool. Of course, her conspicuous act caused her to be targeted by the enemy.

"Don't falter! Surround them and crush them!"

Receiving their commander's order, the Amidonian soldiers swarmed Liscia. Their number was too much for her, no matter how great her valor was. Surrounded by soldiers wielding spears, her horse was unable to break through. As the enemy soldiers' spears aimed at Liscia,

"Princess! Ugh, get OFF OF HER!!!!"

Aisha who had run up to her in the nick of time blew off the entire swarm of enemy soldiers with a full swing of her greatsword. Though she had been assigned as Liscia's guard, she was unable to swing her greatsword freely on horseback and walked instead, which was why she lagged behind. After exterminating the surrounding enemies with the slash and wind pressure from her sword, Aisha ran up to Liscia's horse with teary eyes.

"Princess, please don't be so rash! His Highness is going to yell at me!"

"... sorry, I lost my cool there"

Seeing Aisha beg her with tears in her eyes, Liscia regained her cool. Liscia being on horseback, Aisha's head only reached up to thigh-height of her. She plopped her hand on Aisha's head.

"But, I had to be a bit rash. I ... have to quickly get this battle over with"

"Princess?"

Aisha tilted her head seeing Liscia's grave expression. The Amidonian Army was a little bit persistent, but at the current trend, the battle was moving at the Elfriedenian side's advantage. There had begun to be deserters appearing from Amidonia's side, Elfrieden only needed to slowly complete the encirclement and before long would gain the victory. Which was why there should be no need to be so impatient.

Liecia, however, said to Aisha, still with a grave face.

"Say, Aisha. What do you think of Soma?"

"What do you mean what?"

"Don't you think he's forcing it?"

"That's ... he is, I suppose"

Even from the eyes of Aisha, who was completely devoted to Soma, he currently had a frightening look on his face. No ... 'broken', to be more accurate. Somehow dangerous and worrying. Of course, they were in the middle of a war right now, it would be more problematic if she were to indiscreetly say it to his face. However, she couldn't help but see Soma as looking needlessly frightening. Aisha wanted Soma to smile.

"If this war's over ... will His Highness be able to smile?"

Hearing Aisha's inquiry, Liscia smiled.

"In order for him to smile, that's our job"

"That's right!"

Aisha's expression became serious again. She readied her sword and

stood in front of Liscia.

"But please stand back, princess. If anything happened to you His Highness will not smile again"

"... alright, I'll restrain myself a little"

"Let me do the fighting"

"That I can't do. Do you think Soma will be able to smile if something happened to you?"

"... Is that so?"

"It is"

"Really?"

The two looked at each other and smiled. The next moment, they put on their warrior faces again.

"Then princess. Let's both 'take care of our selves'"

"Yes. Let's end this annoying war with the two of us"

The two ran back together to the ranks. In later years, Soma would say self-deprecatingly:

[Whenever Liscia and Aisha teamed up, even a King or Emperor could not stand up to them] ("hen-pecked", was likely the word he was looking for)

Chapter 11: Decisive Battle (Last Part)

At that time, at the center of the encircled Amidonian Army, Gaius VII, who sat on a folding stool, had a grim expression. His first plan to commence a pincer attack with the soldiers of the Capital『Van』against the besieging Elfrieden Army had come to nothing. The Elfrieden Army wasn't besieging Van, but was waiting for the Amidonian Main Army at these plains. The Amidonian Army, that was exhausted after receiving the surprise attack in Goldoa Valley, entered into the battle with the Elfrieden Army, which was not only almost twice its size, but also well-rested.

The true aim of the Elfrieden Army was not『Van』, but instead the Amidonian Main Army, or rather, Gaius' head. Gaius VII grinded his teeth at this fact. Although Amidonian Army put up a good fight at the beginning of the battle, the army was exhausted and diluted by the peasant conscripts, and it couldn't be expected to hold on for a long time. It was also already impossible to rally the fleeing conscripted soldiers. Since it had come to this state, Gaius resolved his mind and called Julius back from the frontlines.

When Julius returned, he stood in front of his father with an angry expression.

「Father! What is the meaning of calling me back so suddenly! If I leaves the frontlines now, the Elfrieden Army might break through them!」
(Julius)

「.....Julius!」(Gaius)

However, Gaius was informing Julius with a thoroughly calm expression.

「You need to withdraw and leave this battlefield.」(Gaius)

「Wh-what is Father talking about!? The battle has only just begun.....」
(Julius)

「We have lost the war.」(Gaius)

Gaius told the confused Julius directly with a self-mocking tone.

「Our Amidonian Army is strong. The quality of our soldiers is not far behind the Elfrieden Kingdom's. However, with an Army that has been exhausted from marching, it will be impossible to overturn this battle. I will buy you the time, so open a way to escape where the encirclement has still not been completed, and escape even if it's only yourself.」(Gaius)

「Then...If that's the case, Father should be the one who escapes! If it's just buying time, then I can do it!」(Julius)

「That is impossible.」(Gaius)

「Why!?」(Julius)

「Because the Elfrieden Army is aiming at my head.」(Gaius)

Gaius VIII, who had decided that this will be his deathbed, had never had his mind so calm before like this. To the extent that he could see through a fragment of Souma's aims.

「I am a thorn in Elfrieden's side. I am the figurehead of the anti-Elfrieden faction in the Amidonia Dukedom. Because I had gathered those who were hostile towards Elfrieden, the Hawk Faction suppressed the Dove Faction. It is true for the opposite, if I'm gone, then this time it will be the Doves that will gather strength.」[1](Gaius)

The national power difference between Amidonia and Elfrieden was obviously clear. In territory size, in population size, in the numbers of soldiers, and in wealth, Amidonia had lost on just about everything. The difference was much greater when compared to the Grand Chaos Empire, that lay in the west from Amidonia. Even Elfrieden would fall short if compared to it. The people that have weak hearts would always move for their own safety, but no one in Amidonia knew which one they should plan to approach, the Empire or the Kingdom. That's why a heavy anchor named Gaius weighed them down so that Amidonia is still Amidonia, but now Elfrieden is going to remove that anchor. Julius opened his eyes wide.

「No way..... They began this war just to defeat Father!? Even to use

their own territory as bait!?) (Julis)

「Be careful, Julius. The current King is on another level compared to Albert.」 (Gaius)

Gaius didn't ridicule Souma as a young person anymore.

「Therefore, Elfrieden won't let me escape. Even if I escape, they will still pursue me to the ends of hell. That's why, it will be better if I fall here.」 (Gaius)

「.....」 (Julius)

「So, I will remain in this place and show my pride as an Amidonian.」 (Gaius)

「! Then, I will, too.」 (Julius)

「You can't! What will happen to Amidonia if you are gone, too?」 (Gaius)

「There is still Roroa.」 (Julius)

「Humph, that girl is useless. The one who leads Amidonia must be someone who is a “venomous snake”. A venomous snake that will someday bite Elfrieden to death. Regardless, whether or not Roroa has the blood of a cunning “snake” flowing in her, she just doesn't possess any “venom”. After all, she is just a small girl.」 (Gaius)

Gaius spat out those words even though she was his own daughter. Julius asked back.

「Father, then what is that “venom”?」 (Julius)

「Avengeful heart towards Elfrieden. Maintaining the independence of our Amidonia Dukedom even when it was surrounded by powerful countries, opening new lands even if the productivity is meager, enduring the hunger, excavating ores under the harsh environment, the thing that made us able to do these things as a nation, was solely because of our vengeful heart towards Elfrieden. The source of our energy to become even more stronger, even more wealthier, is the heart that detests Elfrieden that had robbed us of our fertile territory..... Unfortunately, even if Roroa has a talent in raising money, she doesn't have that

vengeful heart. The one can succeed that venomous snake blood is only you, Julius.」(Gaius)

As he said those words, Gaius stood up, and put both of his hands on Julius' shoulders.

「For that reason, you have to survive. The only one who can inherit this will of revenge and can make Amidonia Amidonia is you.」[2](Gaius)

「Father.....」(Julius)

「Since it has reached this situation, there is no need to be concerned about being turned into a puppet. You need to beg the Empire for assistance and defend Amidonia from being annexed by Elfrieden.」(Gaius)

「However, just like what Father had said before, do you think Empire will forgive us who have broken the Declaration of Humanity?」(Julius)

「It will be fine if you put all the blame towards me. I, who have passed 50 years of age, declined bodily and lost my mind to become a revenge demon. Without being able to be checked by my son, I plotted to invade Elfrieden against the will of Empire. You can tell them this.」(Gaius)

Julius lost his breath. It can be argued that in this occasion, Gaius wouldn't only die, but he would also be guaranteed to have a completely bad reputation. Even the always relentless and cold Julius had his heart greatly jolted by this. And, at the same time, flames of anger could be seen in his eyes towards Elfrieden. Seeing those eyes, Gaius nodded in satisfaction and let go of his hands from Julius' shoulders.

「Now go, Julius. You must never let that spirit of revenge vanish!」(Gaius)

「..... Forgive me.」(Julius)

Julius made a quick bow and then turned around and left. After Gaius couldn't see Julius anymore, a moment passed before he stood up, took a deep breath and fixed his expression. There was no longer impatience nor bewilderment, it was the expression of a stern warrior as Gaius unsheathed the sword from his waist.

「The remaining thing to do is..... demonstrating the spirit of an Amidonian.」(Gaius)



「.....Isn't this a bit shoddy?」(Carla)

Carla, who was watching the battle beside me, said it with displeasure in her tone. On the battlefield, there are definite signs of the defeat of the Amidonian Army as the number of fleeing or surrendering soldiers increased. Even the soldiers who were still resisting had been completely encircled and were only waiting to be annihilated. Are there any shoddy factors here?

「Where?」(Souma)

「There is no sign of the enemy commander Gaius VIII escaping. It is as if he wants to die in this place.」(Carla)

「If he doesn't flee, then wouldn't it be more convenient for us?」(Souma)

「.....Those who are weak-hearted flee, those who are weak-bodied die. As a result, only the elite that surrounded Gaius are still putting up resistance. If those people become death soldiers[3] then they wouldn't be able to be stopped by half-hearted ones. Much less the soldiers from the already winning army that are reluctant to die.」(Carla)

When she pointed this out and I looked at the battlefield, I could see that although the enemy's main army had been whittled down to 500 or so, our 40000 strong army had quite some difficulty in annihilating them. Even if the number was in the thousands, one soldier at best could be attacked by three soldiers. If they were in dense formations, then that number would decrease. If the enemy had prepared for death and can do reckless things, then we, who were winning, would tend to hold our lives even more dearly. If we die, then we wouldn't get any rewards or glory, after all. That's why they couldn't finish the assault.

There was a chill on my back. I know an "example" of this. In the 「Summer Siege of Osaka[4]」, Sanada Yukimura led 3000 soldiers in a do-or-die assault, and broke through the 13,000 strong army of Matsudaira

Tadanao. It was said that he was merely one step from taking Tokugawa Ieyasu's head. Also, in China's history, after the「Battle of Gaixia[5]」, the winning Liu Bang Army sent several thousand soldier to pursue Xiang Yu, the commander of the defeated army, but they were defeated by Xiang Yu and 28 of his loyal horsemen numerous times. The number of the soldiers became insignificant if there is a great difference in fighting spirit. An army that lacks fighting spirit won't be able to obtain victory no matter how great their number is.

(..... perhaps that unit is straightforwardly aiming at my neck.)

Honestly I was afraid. Sun Tzu also said not to strike at death soldiers. [6] Even so, I couldn't let Gaius escape from this place at any rate. If this happened, the victims created to reach this point would be in vain. However, if..... If the time is..... I looked towards Carla.

「Hey, Carla」(Souma)

「What is it?」(Carla)

「.....Let's talk for a bit.」(Souma)

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「Our aim is the enemy King, Souma Kazuya's head!」(Gaius)

The mounted Gaius VIII yelled out. Gaius had gathered 500 of his elite cavalrymen under his direct command from his surroundings, and currently decided to do a desperado attack[7] at the Elfrieden Army's Headquarters. The thousands strong enemy crowded the surroundings. The road that was awash with enemy soldiers was not a road where they could return alive, but a road that led to their deaths. Even if they were able to kill Souma, they would be killed by the rest of Elfrieden's soldiers. However, amongst the soldiers under his direct command, who had inherited the grudge against Elfrieden passed from father to son for the past 50 years until it permeated into their marrows, not a single one faltered.

「The spirit of an Amidonian! Valor! Show it to the Elfriedens!」(Gaius)

「「「Ooooooooooo!!」」」(Amidonia Soldier)

The soldiers shouted out a war cry, and Gaius swung down his sword towards the Elfrieden Army's Headquarters.

「Everyone, chargeeeee!!」(Gaius)

Gaius VIII led the roughly 500 cavalrymen and rushed towards the Elfrieden Army's Headquarters.

Along the way, they cut down soldiers with sabers and trampled down not only enemies but even the still resisting ally soldiers, who underneath their horses' hooves, pushing their way forward like a windstorm. Like a fire that blazed radiantly just before it vanished; that's why that blaze had such a brilliant light.

「Is Gaius VIII..... insane?」(Ludwin)

Ludwin, the commander of Royal Knights who was guarding the Headquarters from that raging anger, made a sour expression atop his white horse. This reckless attack was not much different from a suicidal action.

(Actually, this might be a real suicidal action. Honestly, I don't really want to deal with it, but.....)

Ludwin put down the helmet that he had taken off before and raised the tip of his cavalry charge lance towards the sky, and spoke towards the rest of the Royal Knights behind him.

「His Majesty is right behind us! We are the Kingdom's shield! Swear by the name of the Royal Knights, that even if you must throw your life away, we must stop that group!」(Ludwin)

「「「Oooooooooo!!」」」(Royal Knights)

「「「Charge!!」」」(Ludwin)

The roughly 2000 Royal Knights under Ludwin's leadership dashed out. Before long, they clashed with Gaius' 500 horsemen from the front. Receiving that attack, about half of Gaius' men were blown away from their horses in an instant. The Royal Knights also had roughly the same number blown off. However, since their number was greater from the

beginning, the damage they took was relatively lighter than their enemy's. Inside the jumbled mess of enemies and allies, Ludwin searched for Gaius' visage.

「! I found you, Gaius VIII!」(Ludwin)

Ludwin finally spotted someone who wore a majestic mantle inside a group of several horsemen which kept pushing towards the Headquarters in this melee. The mantled-person looked at Ludwin and pointed his swords towards Ludwin.

「You bastard! Who are you!」(Gaius)

「Elfrieden Army's Royal Knights Commander, Ludwin Arcs.」(Ludwin)

「Humph, just a capital decoration group.」(Gaius)

「Empty words! I shall finish you here and end this battle!」(Ludwin)

Ludwin made his horse dash towards him, but the horsemen who surrounded the mantled-person scattered into various directions, as if they had planned this before. Ludwin was bothered by this for a moment, but currently his attention was concentrated on the person in front of him. Ludwin lunged his spear at him, but the mantled-person somehow parried it with his sword as best as he could.

「Gugh..... so you are not just a decoration group.」(Gaius)

「No matter how much it has been decorated, a spear is for piercing through the enemy!」(Ludwin)

Then Ludwin struck up to free his spearhead that was entangled with the sword, and then unleashed a blow at the defenseless body in front of him. The lance didn't miss its target, sunk into the enemy's torso, and pierced through the mantle. While vomiting blood, the man dropped his head down and "laughed".

「Splendid.....but it's meaningless.....」(Gaius)

「What?」(Ludwin)

Then, that man turned his head towards the sky and spoke out.

「Your Majesty... Duke..... Splendid..... Our cherished dream.....」
(Gaius?)

Seeing the man die after saying these words, Ludwin was shocked. If he thought about it, he didn't actually know what Gaius' face looked like since Amidonia didn't have any diplomatic relationships with Elfrieden. If, theoretically, he saw "a soldier wearing Gaius' mantle", Ludwin would have thought that that person was Gaius. If the real Gaius was indistinguishable from among the scattered horsemen just now, then...

「! His Majesty!」(Ludwin)

Ludwin turned around, and saw a single horseman heading towards the Headquarters.

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「Report! There is a single horsemen that dashed towards this Headquarters with a staggering speed.」(Soldier)

When the soldier ran inside the Headquarters to give his report, I had just finished asking a request from Carla..... Thank goodness. It was just in time. However, after Carla heard my request, she opened her eyes wide and ground her teeth, brimming with anger.

「Is that.....an order?」(Carla)

「No, this is not an order at all. This is.....a request.」(Souma)

Then, when I touched the collar on her neck, my hand was brushed away.

「Don't kid with me.....」(Carla)

「.....Carla」(Souma)

「Don't kid with me! That request, there's no way I'm going to listen to it!」(Carla)

「However, this is just in case.....」(Souma)

「..... Argh... Okay, already! You just stay here obediently!」(Carla)

Then, Carla snatched longswords from two soldiers who were near her,

and then she spread out the dragon wings on her back and flew away. Afterwards, she hovered around in mid-air and searched for her prey, and, just like a falcon, she flew in a straight dive towards the southern direction.

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『Carla..... I will transfer your ownership as a slave to Liscia.』

That guy suddenly said this line to me. Certainly if the owner is willing, the Slave Collar ownership can be transferred to another person. However, in this case, I can now injure him. Even so, why did he suddenly say those words? When I was going to ask him about it, Souma pointed at the death soldiers.

『Those death soldiers are aiming at me. Even in the worst case, if they are able to kill me, those guys would be burnt out. At that time, it would be easy to annihilate them. That's why there is something I want to request from you, if by some chance, I have been killed in this war, I want you to tell Liscia 「I hand over the throne to you」. Well..... it's a will.』

A will? Is he messing with me? When I asked, Souma made a serious expression.

『I am serious. I am a King, that's why I can't ignore the worst case scenario. Although, I feel sorry about pushing the halfway situation to her, but as long as Gaius is defeated, then it will be easy to make 「Van」 capitulate. Afterwards, just do what Hakuya said and it will surely turn out nicely.』

After saying this, Souma showed a “laugh” on his face..... I noticed that it was different from my thoughts. I had thought that a King is an existence with highest position, the highest authority, and the one who rules the entire country. I remembered that I saw that a king was such an existence from the point of view of a person from the military. That's why I thought that Souma had been bewitched by such power and usurped the throne, and that the whole situation will settle peacefully if we restored King Albert. We thought that if we rejected Souma, then the citizens who supported him would also sober up, but it can be said that we were

picking fights with people who supported Souma. We believed that it was all for this country and I couldn't understand why Liscia threw herself to Souma's side to such an extent.

But now, I understand. Souma doesn't want to become a King. If someone had an arrogant personality and can disregard the responsibility that came with the authority, then they would gladly become a tyrant. However, for the people who understand what that responsibility entails, that authority is only a great burden. The thing that I considered to be stolen, was completely something that was being pushed to another person. From the previous King Albert, for the citizens of this country, Souma had been burdened by every weight possible. I had thought that Souma who was talking about his death ever so lightly was "broken", but..... it's different, he is just "almost breaking". That's why Liscia was steadfastly trying to support him to that extent.

However, right now, as a danger to his life lies ahead, Souma wants to transfer that burden to Liscia. Can Liscia carry a burden this heavy?..... Don't mess with me. Liscia is too honest for a honest person's sake. If she received that burden from Souma, then she would end up carrying an even heavier burden. Her heart would be surely be greatly worn out. In that case, can I allow it? Liscia is my friend. Even if my position is that of a rebel, she is my genuine friend that I want to protect. I can't let my friend be burdened by something this heavy.

Actually, I still hate Souma even now. I can't find myself to like his pride, his way of life, and his unreasonable personality to abandon things. However, so that person will carry the heavy burden instead of my friend, for my friend sake, I can't let him die!

「That's why, I will defeat you!」(Carla)

「What!?」(Enemy General)

I glided towards the general who rode alone towards the Headquarters. With great force, I swung down my swords with both hands. The enemy general received the attack with his sword using both of his hands, but he was thrown off from his horse by that attack. The enemy general fell onto

the ground, but he quickly stood up.

「Damn you..... a dragonewt, huh?」(Enemy General)

「I see that you are a general with a name. I am Castor Valgas' daughter, Carla.」(Carla)

「Castor? Isn't he rebelling against the King?」(Enemy General)

「.....Uh huh. Thanks to this sorry mess.」(Carla)

I pointed at the Slave Collar at my neck. The enemy general barked after seeing it.

「Then move away! My only aim is Souma's head!」(Enemy General)

「Unfortunately, currently I can't allow you to do that anymore.」(Carla)

「Isn't the enemy of your enemy, your friend?」(Enemy General)

「He is an enemy, however I can't let a friend of my friend get killed.」(Carla)

「Tsk. Then in that case, you can die together!」(Enemy General)

◇ ◇ ◇

The enemy general rushed to slash at Carla. Carla caught it with the swords in her hands, but the attack was heavier than she thought, so she was forced to kneel. To push even a dragonewt who had physical power far surpassing most humanoids..... This enemy general's strength, couldn't be thought as something that came from a human.

「What!? Is this really a human's strength!?」(Carla)

「While you scum were soaking in the cosseted Elfrieden, we had been polishing our magic and martial arts!」(Enemy General)

「.....I see. Earth-System Magic, huh?」(Carla)

Earth-System Magic was the gravity manipulating magic that had been used when the Royal Army performed the relief operation at the Dark Elves Village. By making the sword heavier at the moment of the impact, the slashing power would increase. The enemy commander roared.

「Our Royalty's dearest wish is the revenge against Elfrieden! For that reason, we polished our fangs and sharpened our claws! The three generations of our Royalty's wishes, I will fulfill them in this place!」
(Enemy General)

「I see..... So you are Gaius!」(Carla)

Carla who had recognized the enemy general's true identity shifted her right sword to ward off the heavy sword, and then, with the blade in her left hand, she slashed from bottom upwards. Gaius barely evaded it by leaping to the back. Carla then pointed the blade at Gaius.

「If you are a Ruler..... Then, rather than revenge, shouldn't you think about your citizens first?」(Carla)

「Humph. I will be troubled if you think I am similar to the weak Elfrieden Kingdom. The ruler of the Amidonia Dukedom is the one who moves the people with his strong power as he wills!」(Gaius)

「.....Hah, I don't like Souma, but I hate people like you even more!」
(Carla)

Although there was nothing good and also nothing bad, King Albert's rule was a calm one. Carla loved that calm situation, so a person like Gaius, who incites war to satisfy his own personal desire of revenge rather than the wellbeing of his citizens, was the type of person that Carla hated even more than Souma.

「It's the same with me! I don't plan on being liked by the enemy!」
(Gaius)

Gaius put his hand on the ground and spike-like projections came out from the ground around Carla. Carla evaded a direct hit, but the wings on her back were caught by the surrounding ground that had turned into a needle prison, and she had been trapped in a situation where she couldn't move.

「Shit!」(Carla)

Gaius swung down his sword at the trapped Carla. Carla reflexively closed her eyes. The next moment, Carla could hear the thick sounds of

flesh being pierced by a blade..... However, she didn't feel any pain. Carla slowly opened her eyes and what she saw was the sight of an unmoving Gaius, still pointing his sword at her. There were four short and stout dolls thrusting their spears into Gaius' body.

「Gugh.....」(Gaius)

Gaius, who was being pierced by four spears, let out a painful groan. He then changed the way he held his sword from the backhand grip and threw the sword with all of his remaining power. The sword flew weakly and stabbed into the ground, not 10 meters away. As if he had ascertained that sight, Gaius pitched forward and fell down. He wouldn't move for a second time. The person who controlled the dolls, looked at the sword pierced near his feet and let out a sigh.

「He even reached this far. Maybe I ought to learn, even if it's only from his tenacity.」(Souma)

Souma said these words while he withdrew the Musashi Boy-kun dolls (medium sized, spear armed) x4. Carla, who had slipped out from the spike prison, turned her face away with a 「Humph」.

「YO-..... If you are like that, then Liecia will cry, you know.」[8](Carla)

「Well, that's right. I will pass on this.」(Souma)

As he replied, Souma kneeled before Gaius' corpse, and put his hands together in a prayer posture. Carla, who didn't understand the meaning of such a gesture, tilted her head.

「What are you doing?」(Carla)

「No matter who they are, if a human dies, then they can become a Buddha[9]..... in other words, a god; this is a custom from the world that I came from. That's why I am praying so hat his soul can enter Nirvana without losing its way.」(Souma)

「Even for this revenge demon?」(Carla)

「All the more the reason. You don't want him to become an evil spirit because of his regrets and haunt you, right?」(Souma)

「What a surprisingly calculating belief.」(Carla)

Souma stood up and stared at his hands as he let out another sigh.

「Even though it was through the dolls..... This is the first time I have killed a person directly.」(Souma)

Hearing Souma say these words, Carla spat out a 「Hah?」.

「What are you talking about? You had ordered many soldiers to kill up until now.」(Carla)

「As always, you're not going easy on me.....」(Souma)

「Don't go easy on your enemy, this is one of the Valgas House's precepts.」(Carla)

「Considering that precept, you were unexpectedly trying to save me, right?」(Souma)

「It's for Liscia's sake. To protect an ally to the end, this is also one of the Valgas House's precepts.」(Carla)

While they were quarrelling like this, their friends, who had heard the crisis at the Headquarters, finally arrived. Liscia, Aisha, Ludwin, Hulbert, and Kaede were surprised when they saw the fallen Gaius. Liscia then asked Souma.

「Souma is the one who defeated Gaius?」(Liscia)

「Well, since there were the both of us?」(Souma)

「I see..... Thank you Carla, for protecting Souma.」(Liscia)

「Humph.」(Carla)

As expected, she couldn't directly tell Liscia, 「It's for your sake」, so Carla turned her face away and pretend to be mute. While seeing both of them behaving in such a way, Souma clapped his hands.

「Now then, let's enter『Van』. After defeating the main force, it needs to be followed by a capitulation demand, right? In that case, it will be better to add the delivery of Gaius' corpse as one of the terms.」(Souma)

「You will even go so far as to use the corpse, huh?」(Carla)

「If there are things that can be used, then I will use it. Even a poison can become a medicine.」(Souma)

Several hours afterwards, Amidonia Dukedom's 『Van』 capitulated and complied with the terms 「Sparing the life of the garrison soldiers as well approving those who want to leave from the territory (however, they can only bring what they can carry on hand and nothing more than that)」 and 「Gaius' corpse will be returned」.[10] Souma took the entire army to enter 『Van』, and thus this series of battle acts, that would be called 『Five Days War』 in the future, came to an end. But then,

The last battle, however...

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[1] I use Hawk and Dove for Anti-Elfrieden and Pro-Elfrieden factions. Since typing Hawk and Dove is simpler, easier, and I want to make a jab at those chickenhawks out there. (E/N: I felt that this was appropriate. <https://youtu.be/QX5-bfLg9rO>)

[2] To sum it up in 4 words: Make Amidonia Great Again!

[3] Death soldier: A unit which is composed of people who don't care or mind being killed. In some sense, they are like berserker vikings, jihadists, or a suicide squad. Someone who knows that they are gonna die, and laugh at it. They even might seek an honorable death in battlefield (and virgins/mead hall in afterlife) (E/N: Also appropriate. <https://youtu.be/NFQPBzl8aLk> Warning for gore/suicide?)

[4] Siege of Osaka Battle, 1615 CE.

<http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/17thcentury/articles/osaka.aspx>

[5] Battle of Gaixia, 202 BCE. http://www.ancient.eu/Battle_of_Gaixia/

[6] Art of War, chapter 7. Line 36. "Do not press a desperate foe too hard."

[7] A tactical move in which an Army used their doomed piece to eat as much material as possible before it dies. This tends to be a good source of movie plots.

[8] Carla wanted to use Kisama, but she then changed into a more polite, Anata.

[9] Hotoke-sama. Just google it. Japanese concept of soul is too long to be mentioned here.

[10] As far as war go, these terms is really lenient. (E/N: Yeah, Germany got fucked hard after WWI.)

Epilogue: The True Opening

Before we entered the Amidonia Dukedom's Capital City 『Van』, I gave an order to the entire army.

「We will now be entering 『Van』, however, this land is already Elfrieden's territory. Therefore, the people who live in that city are already our Kingdom's citizens, so I absolutely forbid any killing, raping, or pillaging. If there are people who disobey this order, then regardless of their status or position or the nature of the crime, they will be beheaded and their head will be put on display at the gates. Bear this order in mind.」(Souma)

After I gave this order, I secretly called Ludwin and handed a memo that had been prepared beforehand.

「Track down the 5 people who are written on this, behead them and put their heads at the gates. The official reason will be 『They had broken into a house of Van's citizens to pillage』.」(Souma)

「! What did these people.....」(Ludwin)

「This is a souvenir from Georg that was given through Glaive. They are members of the Army, however during their stay in the Carmine Duchy, they had broken into a citizen's house and committed crimes of pillaging, rape and murder. At any rate, sooner or later they will be executed, so let's use them to serve as a warning in this place.」(Souma)

「.....By your will!」(Ludwin)

Presently, there were five heads lined up near the gate. Next to that head was a board with their "crime" written onto it, 『Pillaging Attempt』, that made the soldiers who passed through the gate brace themselves. As a result, the Kingdom's Army, that entered Van, did not commit any arson, plunder and rape, and didn't even dare to fight back if they were being pelted by stones from the citizens who didn't accept the loss. On the other hand, it also would instill a sense of fear in the Amidonian populace.

After they had secured the safety of the path, I entered Van. This time, not in a carriage, but instead I entered the city while mounted on a horse, since it seems that a victorious King who enters while inside a carriage wouldn't look good in public. I was just barely able to ride a horse until recently, but since Aisha held the reins, then it should be alright. While Liscia rode her horse beside me, I looked at the cityscape of 『Van』.

Amidonia Dukedom's Capital 『Van』. A military city established as the foothold of the militarist nation of the Amidonia Dukedom to launch an invasion at the Elfrieden Kingdom and to stand as the front bulwark against the Kingdom's invasion. In addition, as if Amidonia's own spirit didn't want to lose against the Kingdom, the city's size rivaled that of the Kingdom's Capital, 『Parnam』. After entering 『Van』, I had an impression that it was a hybrid city in structure with an utilitarian appearance, however if I can speak frankly, it gave off a mismatched impression.

The citizens' residential areas are crowded and the roads were also complicated. As it is, the layout could even be called as a 『Labyrinth City』.[1] To head towards the Castle, we needed to make turns to the right and left repeatedly. The mansions that seemed to be the residence of nobles were dotting inside the residential areas. When I saw that the nobles' locations were higher (the height, not the land price) than the citizens' quarters, I realized the meaning of this city's layout. Perhaps during the war, the enemy soldiers who had broken through the gate would find themselves scattered by this 『Labyrinth City』 and then, by using the nobles' mansions as strongholds, Amidonia would perform a counterattack.

.....How excessive, to do it to that extent, was what I felt. This city's layout was harsh towards enemies, yet it also didn't kinder towards the citizens. It was also inconvenient to move around, and conflagration in these crowded buildings would be scary. The idea to do the unexpected impediment removal made my head hurt. This is, I have no other choice than to redevelop the entire area, right? Kukuku, a city that is extremely worthy for a redevelopment project. I have a hunch that the domestic affair's tasks would form a huge pile after this, come on, I am thrilled

from waiting!

「Souma? Why are you grinning like that?」(Liscia)

「.....No, nothing in particular.」(Souma)

「?」(Liscia)

Not good, not good. Liscia, who rode the horse beside me, looked at me coldly. I need to put my mind together.

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After we entered the Royal Castle in the center of Van, I sat on Gaius VIII's throne in the throne room. Gaius seemed to be someone who cared about having a majestic appearance. Although I heard that Amidonia's financial situation was rather dire, this throne room was quite splendidly constructed. Perhaps it cost even more money than the one in Parnam Castle. If they had that much money, then they should have circulated the money on other places more, and it made me want to ask the no longer existing castle lord about this.

Beside me, who sat on the throne, was Liscia, and behind us was the bodyguard Aisha, who stood in waiting. The other retainers were standing by on the carpets below the steps. It was the King-like scene that I hadn't had since some time ago. I ordered 「each of you, give a report」, and the reporting turn started from Ludwin.

「First, this is regarding Gaius VIII's family members inside the city. We couldn't find them. The eldest son, Julius, escaped from the battlefield, and while there is one other daughter, she hasn't been seen since several days ago. Furthermore, starting from the Minister of Finance, most of the important bureaucrats couldn't be found, so I believe they had left this city several days before we arrived at Van.」(Ludwin)

「Apart from the daughter, it was troublesome if there are no bureaucrats. Quickly contact Parnam and ask Marcus to dispatch some.

Also, ask Hakuya to come as soon as he is finished with the Crimson Dragon Castle Town.] (Souma)

「As you wish.」(Ludwin)

Ludwin bowed his head. Next, was Poncho's turn to report.

「I-I want to make a report about the Treasury's situation, yes. This might be something that we had feared before, but there are barely any funds and emergency rations. Instead, for some reason, there are an abundance of weapons and the likes, yes.」(Poncho)

「If they don't have any emergency supplies, then how do they plan to hold during a siege?」(Souma)

「Ah, no, there is a 3 month supply if we only count the number of the Castle Guards. But the amount will only last for about one week if we count the entire city's population.....」(Poncho)

「As if saying, 'deal with it yourself'[2], to the citizens. Really a militarist nation..... Sell the weapons and turn them into funds. Then, distribute food rations until the city's situation is settled, however, is it possible to transport food from the Kingdom?」(Souma)

「There is not much surplus in the Kingdom, so it's possible if it's only to some extent. Since this place is close to the Kingdom, then as long as there is a security guarantee along the way, then we can do it, yes.」(Poncho)

「I will arrange for the security to be maximum priority. Next, Glaive.」(Souma)

Hulbert's father and the one who currently leads the Army, Glaive Magna, made his report.

「Perhaps because the "example" is effective, the soldiers maintained their discipline. However, I am afraid that if this restricted lifestyle continues, then there might be an accidental outburst sooner or later. If there are soldiers that make a scene with the citizens, then I believe that the populace's sentiments would immediately deteriorate.」(Glaive)

「So there is also this problem, huh? This city must have taverns and “red-light” establishments, right? With the money we have, negotiate with their proprietors to arrange alcohol and women.」(Souma)

「Will this be alright?」(Glaive)

Glaive raised his voice in surprise. Did I say something strange?

「This way, the citizens on the street wouldn't be inconvenienced, right?」(Souma)

「No, it's not that. Is it alright to let the soldiers idle like this? With our current momentum, isn't it possible for us to annex all of Amidonia?」(Glaive)

Ah, so it's about that matter.

「Our assault ended at 『Van』. We will not be waging war any further.」(Souma)

「Is that so? But I believe we need to strike at the potential enemy.....」(Liscia)

Liscia, who was beside me asked me a question, but I shook my head.

「This is enough. No matter how much we expand our territory, no matter how many cities we conquer, once the Empire moves, then all of it will amount to nothing. Let's avoid the situation since the only result we get is the loss of our men's lives in a futile endeavor.」(Souma)

When I mentioned this, the temperature of the room froze up. Liscia timidly asked.

「The Empire..... will move?」(Liscia)

「Well, there isn't any doubt that they will move. Since the Amidonia Dukedom, a signatory of 『Humanity Declaration』, had its borders changed by military means. As the leader, the Empire must move to deal with this.」(Souma)

The 『Anti-Demon Humanity Coalition Declaration (or Humanity Declaration for short)』that was advocated by the strongest country on the continent,『Grand Chaos Empire』, had three major clauses. One of the

clauses is 『No Recognition for Border Changes due to Wars or Military Action between Humans』, and since we clearly contravened it, so as the leader, the Empire needs to move in favor of the Amidonia Dukedom. At first they will make negotiations, but if necessary, then they won't hesitate to do military sanctions as well. By the way, the difference in military power between Elfrieden and the Empire is roughly similar to that of between Japan and the US.

「But the one who attacked first was the Amidonian Army, even so we will be blamed?」(Liscia)

「That's how international treaties work. Amidonia can claim 『It's Elfrieden's side's fault for not participating in the declaration.』」(Souma)

「Ugh..... If it's like this, then wouldn't it be better if we also participated in the 『Humanity Declaration』... eh, a~rehuh?[3] By the way Souma, why we didn't participate in it? If we fought with Amidonia without participating in the declaration, you knew it would have ended like this, right?」(Liscia)

I laughed when Liscia pointed this out.

「Because we can't participate in it. That declaration has an unthinkable pitfall.」(Souma)

「Pitfall?」(Liscia)

「Yes. It seems that the Empire also hadn't realized it.」(Souma)

If they had realized it, then they wouldn't have drawn that clause. At any rate, that hole is a dangerous article that might cause the collapse of the Empire. I couldn't sign a declaration with a defect like that. Then, I stood up and addressed everyone in the room.

「Well now, let's deal with the postwar management until the Empire moves.」(Souma)

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[1] Are you sure Van's name in the future is not Orario? You get the reference right?

[2] Or “Bugger Off”

[3] Japanese for *huh*?

Credits

Translator: [larvyde](#) / [Yukkuri Free Time Literature Service](#)

Epub: [Estevam](#) / [dotNOVEL](#)